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Science, Criticism, and Poetry

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When Huxley and Arnold debated the relative importance of science and letters in education some half a century ago, the newer discipline was on the offensive against what it considered entrenched and unworthy privilege. The situation is reversed today. Even when professors of the traditional humanities try to climb on to the scientific bandwagon, as happens too often, they yet find themselves a somewhat patronized minority in a world inclined to offer men of test tubes the reverence it once reserved for men of God.

A contemporary critic, observing this loss of privilege and prestige, tells us that the humanist is fighting a losing battle for his job against the advance of science. Whether the humanist's job is involved or not would seem obviously irrelevant to an estimate of his profession, but if the assertion is otherwise right, we ought to know it.

The contemporary humanist may well prefer to

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argue the matter with practising scientists instead of with lay partisans of science inasmuch as the practising scientist is likely to be more logical and more impersonal. In particular we may well desire a critic like Huxley, whom Arnold called with justice "the very prince of debaters". When one considers the clarity of Huxley's style, the courtesy of his controversial manners, the reasonableness of his argument; when one finds in him a professional biologist who could enjoy and value the humanities which he considered too much emphasized; and then when one contrasts his controversial writings with those of most modern partisans of science against the humanities, one regrets that the latter make it hard to conduct a defense on the high plane worthy of the subject.

Nay, from genuine science and the genuine scientist the student of the humanities has little to fear. A genuine scientist may not fully understand the value of a humane discipline, but it is his business to cultivate an open mind and to be concerned impartially with truth. Even the best of scientists too often displays the human susceptibility to prejudice, especially in fields outside his special knowledge; but his training fits him far more than the propagandizing journalist to conduct a debate properly. He and the genuine humanist can meet in a common regard for truth, and put their problems fearlessly to the test of investigation.

But today it is not the practising scientist whom the humanist finds it necessary to debate. The contemporary anti-humanistic blasts come from lay partisans of science. The remarkable achievements of physical research fill them with admiration, and like many of the general public they jump to the assumption that science is the only road to truth. This assumption involves two corollaries, first that science will sooner or later supersede all traditional disciplines including literary criticism; and second that since the fine arts are not science, they cannot as such convey truth or have practical use.

This is, for example, exactly the position of Max Eastman, the critic who sees humanists fighting for their jobs. Mr. Eastman is nowadays best known as a Marxian who, to the horror of orthodox Communists, would like to improve Marx in the light of science; but what concerns us is his considerable literary criticism. According to him the human mind can engage in just two kinds of activity, poetic and scientific. Poetry, he tells us, is "the verbal realization of things in their absence"; its end is to enjoy and communicate experience. Science is "the persistent and skilled use of the mind and the stores of human knowledge about any problem"; it seeks to deal practically with experience. "The poetic as such," he asserts, "is not concerned with conduct or the conveyance of meaning"; it merely "heightens consciousness". As for the criticism of poetry, he has the courage of his convictions, for critic though he himself is, he finds the whole business inane. "It seems to me," he confesses, "that a study of books must be either science – that is, the chemistry and physics of their make-up, and the psychology of their author and his readers – or else history, an account of the general conditions and consequences of their production. Otherwise it is practically nothing at all."

In such assertions he is important not as an individual but as a spokesman of a widespread contemporary point of view. This I wish to challenge on the ground that it exaggerates the scope of science, misrepresents the values of poetry, and ignores the validity of such humane activities as literary criticism. I shall therefore examine the nature of each of these activities and endeavor to draw distinctions among them on the basis of fact. First I wish to consider the nature of science with its consequent relation to criticism.

I. *Science and Criticism*

When we talk of science as such without a qualifying adjective we usually have in mind primarily the physicist and his amazing achievements. His ways are generally felt to be the criterion by which to distinguish true science from false; and searchers in fields where results are thus far less exact than his constantly struggle to approach the mathematical finality of his formulae. It is appropriate therefore to enquire what the physicist himself considers science to be. His definition ought to suffice us on the principle that it is improper to be more royalist than the king. Mr. Eddington has offered perhaps the most widely noted definition of recent years. Science, according to him, seeks to establish quantitative relationships among phenomena; in other words, to reduce nature to formula and measurement. This view is widely held by the scientists themselves, and is echoed by Mr. Eastman when he informs us that "science is never so proudly happy as when it has got rid of qualities, and reduced all the enjoyable glories of this world to mere quantity and number".

It would be easy to show that such a definition excludes a vast amount of knowledge that is both reliable and important, but it would be unfair to take any but the most inclusive definition offered. Herbert Dingle, Honorary Secretary of the Royal Astronomical Society, takes issue with Eddington on the ground that "science is fitted to deal with all experiences which are common to all normal people". Some of these experiences are not measurable. Hence Mr. Dingle includes as genuine sciences those that cannot in the nature of things measure the phenomena they study, so long as these are experiences shared by ordinary human beings. He tells us that science is "the recording, augmentation, and rational correlation of those elements of our experience which are actually or potentially common to all normal people".

A true definition differs from the partial descriptions so often called by that name in that it strikes at fundamental distinctions. This Mr. Dingle's definition does. There is, so far as we can see, a fundamental distinction between experiences that may be universally shared and hence verified (the sight of a painting, for example), and those that are not (such as one's peculiar delight in a painting). This difference is implied in the use of the words objective and subjective. We believe that the painting whose visual image we observe has, as we say, objective existence because we find that all men agree in their reports of its characteristics. But our aesthetic response to the painting (or our moral, or religious, if we have any) is subjective in the sense that we cannot accurately report and compare it, much less reduce it to measurement. (This assertion does not imply that value is subjective in the sense that it is "in" the observer and not the object. The fact is that there must be both an observer and an object before the value can be recognized.) The consequence of Mr. Dingle's distinction that is important for us is that he excludes art and religion from the domain of science. Beauty, he declares, "cannot be ignored, but it is not susceptible to scientific treatment".

Accepting Mr. Dingle's distinction, let us consider its consequences to criticism and poetry. At first glance it would seem to substantiate the opinions of those who say that the arts are not concerned with truth. But such an interpretation rests on an ambiguous use of the word truth. Science admittedly concerns itself with the truths of the external world. But subjective experiences caused by the external world are also true not merely in the sense that they exist and are important but also in the sense that they can be judged and valued. The humanist and his opponents agree that the arts serve as mediums both to describe aspects of the world and to suggest subjective effects of that world on the observer. The fact that a painting has aesthetic value when a photograph has not indicates that the suggestive function is the essential one. In this sense, then, the arts may be understood as mediums of communication between the subjective experience of the artist and that of the observer. But such experience is never merely passive like a photographic film; it is inevitably selective, and as a result it inevitably, by implication, evaluates and judges. A painting not merely communicates the artist's subjective experience; it asserts the importance of the experience selected for visual record, by the very fact that that only, and no other, actually was recorded.

A work of art thus becomes the concrete expression of a preference and makes appeal to the suffrage of those who view it. The artist asserts; and all who either accept or deny the assertion are in a crude way critics of his product. The artist, as we say, creates a value; other men rank the value high or low in their scales of value, not intellectually and in measured terms like the scientist, but by direct response of those faculties which we call, roughly, emotional and imaginative. Both the creation and the criticism deal with value; they both have their being in the realm of value. But science is excluded from this realm. To the scientist, as Frederic Barry puts it, "in its aspects as known, all experience is one". To the scientist "there is no aristocracy or hierarchy of ideas; such notions . . . are . . . moral or aesthetic". But values are ultimately and by definition the only things that really count in life; they are ultimately the goal of every activity, including science. Hence all truths, or aspects of "truth", which are concerned with value depend on moral or aesthetic judgements. The arts are in consequence very much concerned with truth, and we find the justification for Arnold's description of poetry as a "criticism of life".

But, it may be asked, is there not a science of aesthetics? a science of ethics? even of theology? We must not beg the question by mere assertion. The answer must be that such studies are sciences only when and in so far as subjective experiences are objectified in some fashion, as by oral or written reports. The sciences are then attempts to augment and correlate these records, which become experiences common to normal people. But the records are inexact representations by means of words on paper, and not the subjective experiences themselves.

Similarly with psychology. If these principles are sound, it is a science as far as it can deal with records or sensible behavior, which are objectively observable. The introspective psychologist writes down an account of his subjective experience. This account is then taken to be an adequate representation of the experience, and since it is an objective fact, may be shared by all, classified, correlated, and otherwise treated in a scientific manner. But the words on paper, so far from being the experience, are pretty sure to be inadequate as an account of it. It takes an artist – a novelist, for example – to approach accuracy in such matters; and psychologists, worthy men all, are seldom artists.

This obvious difficulty has so impressed the behaviorists that they declare all such data unscientific. As a consequence they refuse to use introspection, and at times, even, carried away by apostolic zeal, have, we hear, denied its existence. As scientists they would confine themselves solely to observing, recording, and correlating observable physical reactions. As scientists they would seem entirely justified in so doing. (This I say without endorsement of the extra-scientific opinions of behaviorists about education, or morals, or philosophy.) Certainly those psychologists who use the records of introspection must, if they are candid, admit the inadequacy and inexactitude of their material. Otherwise they become dealers in empirical rules and fanciful theories like the psychoanalysts. At their best they try to lessen the inexactitude by all means in their power, and as a consequence develop the subtle technique of inner communication of the poet, and the subtle technique of inner analysis of the philosopher. In fact, if they are really expert at such work they *become* poets and philosophers. Witness William James.

On the basis of Dingle's distinction we might therefore suggest that what is called psychology is divisible into a science and an art. As a science it is a misnomer, since it leaves the psyche out; correctly called behaviorism, it is an offshoot of the physical science biology, growing from the particular branch physiology. Psychology as introspective analysis, on the other hand, is a liberal art, a humanity, a task which requires the powers of poetry for expression and those of philosophy for judgement. In general it must be a branch of philosophy, as indeed until recent years it was always considered. As such it cannot of course obtain results verifiable by scientific means, but it is none the less concerned with truth and may have much of practical importance to tell mankind.

But if we grant that such psychology, though not strictly a science, may be a worthy source of truth and guidance, we have in effect justified literary criticism also. For the literary critic must use the indeterminate data of introspection also. To be exact, his data are not works of art (objective facts), nor mere subjective experiences, but subjective experiences arising directly from works of art. His conclusions cannot be scientifically verified, still less reduced to formula and number. But so far as right valuation of a fine art is important to civilization, so far will the critic's work be important.

I have been using the word science in the sense of

Mr. Dingle's definition, but it has wider connotations which we must not ignore. For example, to be scientific implies also ability to use the experimental method of observation, record, and induction, of hypothesis and verification. Surely, so far as the nature of the problem admits, such a method is applicable to criticism. Again, to be scientific implies a mind disciplined in the virtues of disinterestedness, suspended judgement, persistence, accurate and painstaking honesty. The scientific method, and the scientist's virtues, how admirable are they both! It is for these things that the scientist justly receives a measure of reverence, for they are genuine moral virtues, the result of spiritual discipline and high aspiration. And to possess them the critic may well emulate the scientist. Too often instead critics are hasty, dogmatic, and *a priori* in method; biassed special pleaders instead of loyal searchers for truth. This charge lies against many of both journalist and academic critics. So far then as we fall short of the scientist in these respects we should reform ourselves; and in this sense of the word certainly we should try to be "scientific".

At the same time we must insist on the more fundamental distinction between our province and the scientist's. Aesthetic valuations are and must continue to be insusceptible to exact or quantitative definition, measurement, or agreement. I am glad that I can quote even the chief apostle of science to this effect, for in a candid moment John Dewey wrote as follows: "The case of astronomy is typical of physical science in general as compared with knowledge of human affairs. The essential of the latter is that we cannot indulge in the selective abstractions that are the secret of physical knowing. When we introduce a like simplification of the social and moral subjects we eliminate the distinctively human factors: – reduction to the physical ensues."

The case has been admirably put by Stuart P. Sherman:

> It is impossible to make the study of literature a rigorously scientific pursuit [he declared] without terribly impoverishing it. You cannot give it the standing of a science unless you deliberately choose to ignore those scientifically imponderable elements in thought and feeling which essentially and permanently distinguish the field of humane letters from the field of science. In the approach to these elements the scientific spirit is, as everyone would admit, an indispensable lamp to the feet, but in dealing with them one must use a headlight filled with another oil. The moment you touch upon them, you have passed the boundaries of the unvarnished verifiable fact. You are in the Debatable Land; you are in the moral world. Philosophy and religion lie before you, and ethics and aesthetics – which is not a science outside of Germany – encompass you round. You must proceed with tradition, authority, and a seasoned judgement to guide you, yet walking mainly by the "inner light". You are shoulder to shoulder with the thrice accursed "literary fellows" in the demesne of the man of letters. You are in imminent peril of becoming a literary dilettante, and there is one chance in a thousand that you may become a great critic or literary historian.

But if criticism cannot achieve the verifiable results of science it does not follow that it must accept a doctrine of anarchy. To Anatole France the subjectivity of our literary judgements seemed so significant that he denied the validity of all critical generalizations. An adequate answer to such scepticism would require a separate paper, but here it may be observed first that the argument, logically followed to its conclusions, makes life unliveable and reduces all purposive action to absurdity, for by the same reasons no standards in morals and conduct are valid. Such a conclusion is rejected by common sense. Again, works of art are objective facts, and the responses of men at different periods to these works have an observable uniformity which gives reasonable authority to careful generalizations based upon them. At first we may, as France suggests, be merely impelled by force of opinion to respect the masters. But a continued cultivation of literary taste, and a thorough understanding of the background in which the masterpieces were produced, enable us to recognize greatness for ourselves. Such experience cannot in the exact or scientific sense be universal, for it cannot be exactly shared. Diversity of opinion is therefore inevitable, even regarding the greatest, and much more as regarding the mediocre. But to the trained critic it is comprehensible and explicable, even as are differing moralities to the philosopher. It is never the chaos of whim pictured by France, and indeed his own excellent taste refutes his theories. Finally it is based upon the assumption that beneath the vagaries of fashion and doctrine, human nature remains in essentials the same at all times and places.

The humanist may, then, conclude a consideration of the relation of science to criticism with the claim that though he ought to profit by the scientist's example in many ways, his own traditional methods have been grounded on the nature of his material; and he may properly oppose any crude importations of the method of physical science into his field without being branded an "obscurantist" or an "enemy of knowledge".

One other matter calls for a word before we leave the subject. This is the function common to science and criticism of selecting from concrete experience elements of similarity, of making these the basis for classification, and of seeking final abstract summaries. Both pursuits function through generalizations. Those of science are verifiable; those of criticism must always be tentative and approximate; but this likeness they both possess in common, and in its possession they both differ from poetry. The poet is unquestionably concerned with reproducing experience itself, and modern theorists lay great stress upon this fact. It is therefore to their definitions of poetry that we now turn.

II. *Poetry*

Poetry, says Mr. Eastman, is "the verbal realization of things in their absence"; it is not concerned with conveying meaning, but merely "heightens consciousness".

The emphasis here upon the poetic function of reproducing concrete experience is sound. The elements in the definition that I wish to challenge are the rigid dichotomy of the human mind into the two parts of science and poetry, and the exclusion from the latter of anything except reproduction. Poetry undoubtedly does what the critic says it does; but it does not stop there.

In denying such a limitation, however, I run counter to more important writers, chief of whom is Croce. According to the Italian philosopher the mind is constituted of two separate and exclusive territories, that of philosophy or science, and that of art. Science is known by concepts; art by intuitions. At the instant an intuition rises into consciousness it is, according to Croce's peculiar form of statement, "expressed", and is therefore art. (Its transference to paper or canvas he considers merely a matter of practical concern, not of aesthetics.) On this basis he constructs a series of equations: an intuition = image = expression = art = lyric = beauty = language = poetry, etc. This simplification may do his intentions injustice, but it is certainly what one derives from a careful study of his statements. These equations are even reversible: art = expression; expression = art. If one accept them as premisses, one can reach conclusions that are sweeping and startling indeed. It must have been with a glorious feeling of omniscience that a disciple of Croce like J. E. Spingarn swept aside all the problems that critics have been puzzling over since Aristotle.

Croce, we are told, is a Hegelian idealist, and a thorough study of his aesthetic, which is a logical development of his epistemology, would lead us deep into metaphysics. Fortunately the purposes of this discussion scarcely require such a task. What concerns us here is the rigidity of his distinction between science and poetry and the consequence that the latter, as lyric expression, cannot convey conceptual truth. He writes: "An artistic image portrays an act morally praiseworthy or blameworthy. . . . We might just as well judge the square moral or the triangle immoral as the Francesca of Dante immoral or the Cordelia of

Shakespeare moral, for these have a purely artistic function, they are like musical notes in the souls of Dante and of Shakespeare." Alas, an aesthetician who would avoid disagreement should avoid concrete examples! How we as individuals judge Francesca and Cordelia depends on our personal ethics. But this is not the point. The point is that these characters (as expressed in the poetic record) were morally significant to Dante and Shakespeare, and are so to us. Musical notes indeed! As though it were not the very moral issues involved in their deeds that cause our chief emotion toward them!

Many less noted and less systematic writers of recent years have agreed with Croce that poetry is concerned with lyric expression only, not truth. Paul Valéry takes credit for originating the term "poésie pure", which stands, he says, for the expression of "an emotive state of soul", one that is primitive and "essentially impractical". But for him actual poetry is never wholly pure; pure poetry is an ideal. The Abbé Brémond gave the term wide publicity a few years ago in an address which expressed similar views, and in subsequent books amplified and defended his views with wit and learning. For him pure poetry is like prayer an expression of a mystic power above the reason. For him as for Valéry it is to be separated as far as possible from the "impurities" of practical reason and meaning.

No less distinguished a poet than the author of *The Shropshire Lad* has recently expressed himself to the same effect, though his sardonic humor and donnish pride at not running his thought down and cornering it inhibited him from developing his views into a doctrine. "I think that to transfuse emotion – not to transmit thought but to set up in the reader's sense a vibration corresponding to what was felt by the writer – is the peculiar function of poetry." "Poetry is not the thing said but a way of saying it." "Poetry indeed seems to me more physical than intellectual." Housman's views are surprisingly romantic as coming from a classical scholar whose own poems are gems of classic craft, and are in content among the most powerful expressions of modern pessimistic scepticism.

Unquestionably the imaginative suggestiveness and melody of verses quoted by these three writers are as they say beautiful and mysteriously moving. I join their praise of beautiful words melodiously matched, and I envy them their gift of eloquent praise. Such is not the issue in question, but the exclusion of everything from pure poetry except such qualities. For example, when Housman prefers Blake to Shakespeare, he does so at the expense of qualities in the latter for which he, like the world in general, feels high admiration. "Shakespeare is rich in thought, and his meaning has power of itself to move us, even if the poetry [*sic*] were not there; Blake's meaning is often unimportant or virtually non-existent, so that we can listen with all our hearing to his celestial tune." The issue here may seem a mere matter of definition, and Housman justified in limiting his term to mere verbal melody, or something of the sort. But it is more than that: he tells us by implication that Shakespeare was not poetical when he was thinking. Furthermore he really begs the question whether melody and thought can combine into a unified and "pure" work of art. "Apple pie is rich in apple, which has power of pleasing even if the pie is not there." True; but beside the point if the issue is the gustatory value of apple pie. Housman exalts an ingredient as though it were the finished product. His position indeed implies that no poet "rich in thought" can achieve artistic perfection, and that our best service to the dramatist, or to Milton, or to Dante, let us say, would be to cull the flowers of "poetry" from them, and leave the residue to the scientists. But the residue would not include merely moralizings of the characters, and auctorial comments, but even the structure and argument of the poem. Milton could be left his metaphors and purple patches. Indeed, as Mr. Housman sings:

Oh many a peer of England brews
Livelier liquor than the Muse,
And malt does more than Milton can
To justify God's ways to man.

In passing I must also disagree that Blake's meaning is unimportant, for it seems to me that he expressed with great force and accuracy a philosophy of romantic primitivism. But the final issue comes down to the difference between those who, true to the romantic tradition, seek emotion in and for itself, and those who wish it based on the justification of high thought and disciplined imagination. The former attitude is really a refined form of sentimentalism, seeking feeling for the feeling's sake regardless of its justification. And it would seem an inadequate definition of poetry that excludes from Shakespeare qualities which the definer himself, like all sensitive and intelligent readers, so greatly admires.

A different school of thought in recent years derives its theories from psychoanalysis. These Freudians and semi-Freudians tell us in various ways that poetry (like all art) is a wish-fulfillment similar to dreams. It is therefore in its pure state a product not of the conscious mind (which deals with practical and scientific things) but of the unconscious, which is primitive and childish and emotionally charged and dynamic. In this fashion speaks Gilbert Murray when he talks of ". . . those parts of the mind, analytic, critical, deliberative, which are both alien and dangerous to poetical inspiration". "What we call inspiration," he continues, "seems to depend on elements that are exceedingly old in the history of human development, instincts that lie at the very depths of human nature. . . ." To Robert Graves poetry is a means of harmonizing latent conflicts between the subconscious and the conscious personalities of the poet. Albert Mordell tells us that "ecstasy, imagination, and the unconscious are all convertible and synonymous terms for the primitive source of poetry". "Poetry, like dreams, creates a state where unfulfilled unconscious wishes are gratified." (Mr. Mordell does not, however, exclude moral function from poetry.) And Professor Prescott offers us a lengthy volume, *The Poetic Mind*, to prove a similar thesis.

All these anti-intellectualists and anti-moralists, as later I shall have occasion to indicate more fully, link directly with the romanticism of the early nineteenth century, and partake of the virtues and failings of romanticism. A thorough study of them would inevitably require far more than the scope of this essay. It is sufficient here to judge their doctrine on its merits.

The fact that that doctrine is widely held, and by people of such notable achievements, lends it unquestionable weight. For a person whose attempts at writing verse have convinced him that his proper medium is prose to question poets like Housman and Valéry might well seem presumptuous, except for the other fact that it is not their poetry that is questioned, nor even the praise of magic lines in other poets. Undoubtedly the poetry they and the others quote contains such elements and derives from some such sources as they suggest. Even Freudianism has its obvious basis in fact, fantastic as its explanations of the fact often seem.

My wish, then, is not to disparage the merits of these writers, nor to deny that there is a primitive element in the mind, call it "subconscious" if you will; or that this element finds expression in poetry. It is simply to deny that poetry is exclusively concerned with this element, and that when other elements find expression through poetry, they are to be branded "impurities".

I consider that the sane mind is an organic unity, and that in art products of that mind which adequately express its unity should be critically preferable to those which tend to exclusive expression of but one element or faculty. I make this claim on the judgement of both classicism and common sense that balance and proportion are *preferable* to over-preponderance of separate elements.

Indeed it is easy to demonstrate that the identification of poetry with mere lyric tends to unbalance and excess. Mr. Eastman's views, for example, lead him to follow Wordsworth in identifying poetic power with childishness. Like Wordsworth, he tells us that children are unconscious poets and suggests that "shades of the prison-house descend upon the growing boy". When therefore he ridicules those among the modern poets who as he says "cultivate unintelligibility", he would seem inconsistently to be attacking just the qualities which he finds poetic in children.

His objection is, to be sure, based upon the sound opinion that literature should be a communication (an opinion in which, to his credit I think, he differs from Croce), but sound as this opinion is, it does not develop from his doctrine. That doctrine puts entire emphasis on the heightening of consciousness. And if this heightening be the true test of poetry, it follows that when subjective states are exalted they must be poetic, whatever the source of the exaltation. No, this is not an unfair *reductio ad absurdum.* He tells us that "there are fifty thousand morphine-takers in Paris, and all over the face of the earth how many million chewers, and breathers, and swallowers of what, far from being of practical value, is both costly and deleterious, bearing unconscious witness to the poetry of human nature"!

An equally unbalanced primitivism is found in Professor Prescott. "Children, and older persons who retain something of the habit of children, are wisest and best." ". . . The unconscious mind is superior in insight and wisdom, to the conscious one; and this must be insisted upon because it will demonstrate the superiority of poetry drawing upon this source to any merely intellectual product." "The deeper choice is the wiser, and in general the imaginings of the unconscious mind will represent a deeper wisdom and morality." This is again, with Freudian frills, an echo of Wordsworth, who called a six-year youngster "mighty prophet, seer blest".

Once more in doubting the wisdom of a great poet's theories I am not denying the beauty of his inspired passages. There are, as the famous parody tells us, two voices in Wordsworth; "one is of the sea", the other that of an "old, half-witted sheep". And again, in considering such views as these excessive if not silly, we do not deny that children have a fresh and unsophisticated capacity for impressions, or that a rich poetic spirit must build upon a foundation of emotions that are both deep and strong. I have, I repeat, no wish to deny the element of truth in these doctrines. But to make that element a justification for an attack upon intelligence and mature wisdom in poetry seems to me both dangerous in tendency and false in fact.

The danger of such primitivism consists in its attack on the exercise of controlled intelligence, which lies at the roots of civilization. The primitivists are faced by the dilemma of having to deny that poetry is a major human activity – denying the importance of the thing they love – or of declaring its importance while depriving it of all serious significance. But this subject also would lead us too far afield if we were to discuss it adequately. Our concern here has been simply to show that the denial of wisdom to poetry leads to absurd extremes.

It must now be our task to indicate that it is false in fact. I shall attempt to do this first by an appeal to general considerations, and second by an appeal to the history of poetry.

III. *The Dogma of Amorality*

On general considerations a sensible person with no axe to grind will, I think, be sceptical of any distinction that separates human nature into watertight compartments. But critics like Croce go much further than a mere theoretical separation, for they serve notice upon the artist that whatever he does, he must not use his intelligence, or write about practical concerns, moral or other. Again and again they lay down the dogma: poetry has nothing to do with morals.

We thus observe the curious phenomenon of critics who in one breath denounce dogmatism in traditional criticism, and in the next dogmatize themselves. Mr. Spingarn, for example, when he launched his violent attack upon the humanistic tradition, told the world in the name of what he called creative criticism that "we have done with" all such problems as those of genre or style or morality. But the critic is set free from the frying pan into the fire. He must, in Mr. Spingarn's school, deny himself concern with everything but his personal intuition of the poet's intuition at the moment of the poetic act, it being assumed without explanation or suggestion of a method that such an intuition is possible in a world of solipsistic Crocean idealism. He and many others have stressed the narrowness and dogmatism of the academic pseudo-classicist. One can agree that they have cause. But Pope and Boileau were never, at their narrowest and most dogmatic, more restraining to the liberty of poetic or critical imagination than these modernists. Pope and Boileau set too much store by "wit", but allowed for inspired genius. Mr. Spingarn, on the contrary, grants the poet and the critic nothing but their bare intuition, stripped by definition of all reflection, wisdom, experience, intelligence.

The animosity of these critics toward moralism in literature is, to be sure, psychologically understandable. They are generally men of sensitive taste. Probably in their youth, passed in or near the Victorian era, they suffered under the solemn search for messages and meanings conducted by academic pundits with more learning than taste. Probably they were rendered especially indignant when some such tasteless moralizer drew and quartered a favorite poet for lack of ethical values, the while ignoring his lyric glories. Such stupid didacticism has been far too common, and has unfortunately been mistakenly identified with classicism. Mr. Spingarn in particular must have suffered keen aesthetic pain during his arduous labors for the doctoral dissertation when he plowed through the critical theorists of the Renaissance. His violent reaction is understandable, but its validity is not proved.

To free poetry, which they did right in loving, from the gyves of pseudo-classicism was a worthy task for these romantic critics. But in doing so they declared that all lyrical expression is poetry, which would seem a bold declaration if we consider all the outcries of humanity which in consistency they would have to include. Yet they were led by the vivacity of their revulsion to go even further and to maintain that all poetry is identical with lyrical expression. That position requires that they exclude from poetry both reason and concern with the practical problems of living. What a liberation is this, that limits the range of poetry to cries of feeling, and confounds the infant with the virtuoso!

Art is admittedly an expression of human feeling, but also of human experience in all its variety. In experience, problems of reason and conduct play paramount parts. All the problems of war and peace, of economic justice and social welfare, of individual happiness and opportunities – all those ends to which men aspire and for which they struggle in the dust and sweat of daily life – all involve reason and the moral sense. Yet the poet must shut himself up with his private feelings. Small wonder that the Philistine scorns the romantic in his ivory tower. Is it not reasonable to assume that the poet has a right to claim his whole heritage as a human being? Is it not reasonable to assume that the house of art has many mansions, some inhabited by sentimental souls who by breathing and chewing and other such means heighten their consciousness, but others by soberer poets concerned with the problems of social living and spiritual welfare?

On this issue extremes meet and the classicist finds himself in agreement with the communist. The depression brought down upon us a flood of Marxian critics who, unlike the unorthodox Mr. Eastman, declare their acceptance of propaganda – of a Marxian sort – in art. Such of them as are men of taste appear to be uneasy in this position and qualify it by remarks to the effect that a work of art is most successful both as art and as propaganda when it mirrors the spirit of the age; but to them of course the spirit of the age means the class struggle. However, the classicist can afford to smile at the way in which our former aesthetes have gone all the way over to the stern moralism of Marx.

But until they were converted they agreed with the majority who for generations have held and still hold that propaganda is incompatible with art. "If any form of economic or class propaganda has been literature," writes Mrs. Mary M. Colum, "I am unaware of it. The same can be said for the class of writing that is propaganda for morals, or the inner check, or for creeds, opinions, or points of view." And of course there is a measure of justice in her view. When propaganda becomes dominant in creative writing it tends to interfere with and even destroy artistic effect. All lovers of literature detest obvious special pleading, unless for their own pet causes. But a sound objection to propaganda of this sort need not involve any essential incompatibility between morals (or other practical considerations) and art. The point is that special pleading is seldom universal enough in its emotional and imaginative appeal. "Sometimes," Mrs. Colum continues, "passionate religious poems have been good propaganda for a creed. But this was not because the poems were primarily propagandist; it was because they were poems of love, poems made out of one of the four great spiritual passions that are at the root of all life and all literature. . . ." In spite of her principles Mrs. Colum likes spiritual and impassioned propaganda. So do we all. Such propaganda becomes art.

It would seem, then, that a definition of poetry (or creative literature) that arbitrarily excludes matters of reason or practical concern is on general considerations inadequate. But it is also inadequate historically because it fails to include the great poetry of the past.

IV. *Poetry and Meaning*

To the ancient Greeks, who originated the term and wrote some fine examples of the thing, poetry at first meant simply something made. Aesthetic theory began with the notion that poetry and the other arts were "imitations" or copies of things and events. On the basis of this naïve conception Plato assailed poetry for copying what was in his opinion itself a mere copy of true reality. He felt the inadequacy of "Imitation" but attacked the art rather than the theory. At first in the *Poetics* Aristotle used the word in its literal sense, but as he went on he enlarged the meaning of *mimesis* from copying to interpretation. The word remained ambiguous, but of the higher function of art Aristotle leaves no doubt for the attentive reader. The cardinal assertion in the treatise declares that poetry is a higher and more philosophical thing than history (which included "natural history" or science), because poetry deals with the universal, whereas history deals with the particular. Aristotle's view implies correlative functions for poetry and philosophy, the former illustrating the truths of experience by the concrete instance, the latter drawing from the concrete instances material for its abstract generalizations.

This is decidedly not a doctrine of "poésie pure", but there is more to come. In utter contrast to our modernists, Aristotle scarcely mentions the lyric, gives some space to the epic, passes briefly over comedy, and devotes most of his attention to tragedy. In other words, to him poetry was primarily not short lyrics but serious drama. Again, the poet, he tells us, is not a poet by right of composing in verse, although even then people used the word "as if it were not the imitation that makes the poet, but the verse that entitles them all indiscriminately to the name". The poet, then, is one who "imitates" or interprets imaginatively and with philosophic understanding. Interprets what? His own soul states? No! "The objects of imitation are men in action." Tragic drama is the highest form of poetic expression.

Aristotle's views show a tendency toward an aesthetic as distinguished from a moralistic theory of art, but even he expects art to justify itself on moral grounds. To the Greeks in general art was strictly judged by its moral value. Aristophanes, for example, though too obscene a dramatist for some of our purer American cities such as Los Angeles, was at the same time according to his lights exceedingly moral. His dramas were indeed written not simply to amuse, but for propaganda – to attack current social evils and to urge reform. In *The Frogs* he assails Euripides, as he does elsewhere, for a variety of faults but chiefly for weakening the manly valor of the Athenians by sophistical scepticism, in contrast to Aeschylus, the doughty defender of traditional virtues. And yet he makes this sceptic Euripides, speaking in the play, define the aim of poetry as a moral one. Aeschylus asks, "What are the principal merits entitling a poet to praise and renown?" And the younger dramatist is made to reply: "The improvement of morals, the progress of mind, when a poet, by skill and invention, can render his audience virtuous and wise."

Plato in certain passages praised poetry as of divine inspiration, but in others voiced the puritanic objection that it "feeds and waters the passions". His concern with it was perhaps inconsistent but was certainly moral. Aristotle, apparently in rebuttal of Plato, defended tragedy from the last charge in his famous doctrine that through pity and terror it purges those passions. Whatever the merits of this doctrine, for which I hold no brief, it obviously was the result of a moralistic concern with literature. A student of the subject has recently published a monograph to show that at their height all the Greek arts were considered by artists and public alike the servants of morality and religion. Homer in particular was to them a sort of Bible. If the modern doctrine of anti-morality is sound, it is strange that the Greeks produced so many masterpieces.

Poetry, then, was thought of as being concerned chiefly with general truth; as best expressed by the narrative forms of epic and drama; and as justified mainly by its moral effects. These views obtained without important opposition throughout subsequent history until the romantic revolution in the nineteenth century. Horace popularized the critical tag that poetry pleases or instructs, or both. The practical values of poetry were here suggested in the most prosaic fashion, and the problem of the relation of its moral to its aesthetic effects was evaded by the formula that there is much to be said on both sides. Yet even here the influence of the lofty Greek conception of poetry as universal and inspiring may be felt. Among the moderns Dryden was "something of a heretic" when he declared that "delight is the chief, if not the only end of poesie", though later in the same essay he limited this assertion by the declaration, Greek in its spirit, that "moral truth is the mistress of the poet, as much as the philosopher". No lover of literature seriously questioned its value as inspiration; and even among the romantic rebels there were many like Shelley who, under Platonic influence, exalted the poet as prophet and moral teacher.

Romanticism, however, was primarily in revolt against this as against other elements in the classic tradition. For the first time in history feeling or sensuous experience, typically passive, and ungeneralized by reflection, was exalted as the highest form of poetic expression. "All good poetry," wrote Wordsworth, "is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." He added, it is true, that such poetry must come from a man who had "thought long and deeply", but the qualification was a concession, not an important element in his poetic theory. He wrote with his whole heart when he sang the praises of a "wise passiveness".

Poe has had a wide influence, especially among the French through his translator and admirer Baudelaire. His views retain a mixture of tradition. Poetry "deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul". The emphasis on excitement is typically romantic; the elevation is a concession to orthodoxy. Though he avows "as deep a reverence for the True as ever inspired the bosom of man", and though he allows that "the incitements of Passion, or the precepts of Duty, or even the lessons of Truth" may be introduced "incidentally" into a poem, yet he attacks what he calls "the heresy of The *Didactic*", urges poetry "written solely for the poem's sake", and stresses the successful poem's approach to music. Here we see in germ Pater's doctrine that the arts approach the condition of music, and the doctrine of art for art's sake. And of course Poe's practice counted for more than his precepts toward the exaltation of verbal melody separate from meaning, and of esoteric symbolism. Hazlitt was more radical and less circumspect than either, and candidly expresses the dominant feeling of romanticism. He identified the passion with the art: "Fear is poetry, hope is poetry, love is poetry, hatred is poetry; contempt, jealousy, remorse, admiration, wonder, pity, despair, or madness, are all poetry." Poetry expresses the thrills of feeling, and is known in the reader by responsive thrills. And in this spirit Mr. Housman finds poetry "more physical than intellectual", and recognizes it by a shiver down the spine.

To object to this exaltation of feeling is not to deny its importance, much less its existence. It is to deplore its overemphasis. The consequence was that the lyric became the chief poetic form, and the drama, which requires an objective representation of men in action, languished. The complete triumph of the lyric may be judged when we read Arnold's preface to his poems (1853) and note the oddity of his position when he asks, "What are the eternal objects of Poetry, among all nations and at all times?" and answers, "They are actions; human actions." This is straightforward Aristotelianism, but it is so far removed from us who are the inheritors of romantic doctrines that not one in a hundred modern readers, I venture to say, would think of it. On the contrary Mr. Spingarn sums up the dominant romantic creed of our day. "All art," he declares, "is lyrical."

Nowadays when a person speaks of a poem he is almost universally assumed to mean a short lyric. The dramatist was the chief of poets to the Greeks, not because he happened to write in verse but because he dealt with human actions. Today for the first time in history the drama is generally considered something different from poetry. The revolution is complete. There may be, indeed, little enough poetry in the Greek sense in many modern plays; but the distinction is one of kind: we speak of "poets" *and* "dramatists". The revolution gets perhaps its ultimate expression in a commentary of Mr. Eastman's that boldly (or naïvely) undertakes to reverse the plain meaning of the *Poetics*. "Drama was regarded as a division of poetry by Aristotle," he tells us, "simply because prose dramas were unknown to him"!

As a result of this narrowing and specializing of meaning, what we think of as poetry and what is written and published as poetry has become more and more the kind of expression which in fact merely "heightens consciousness". Mr. Eastman, however, asserts that this change was the inevitable result of the advance of science. Disciplined thought, he tells us, has taken over one by one the realms of human speculation where formerly undisciplined fancy – poetic or otherwise – roamed. There is truth in his account. As organized knowledge advances, poets like other people must accept its findings. But the observation is beside the point. The poets who speculated were utilizing what science their times possessed, and their poetry at its best was not merely a means of heightening consciousness but of reflecting upon life. Not only that, but only the extreme partisan would be so rash as to assert that the wisdom of the past embodied in great poetry, when it deals with the spiritual needs of men, is now or ever will be invalidated by science.

As an example consider "Lycidas". Doubtless the impressionist critic would do full justice to passages that convey sensuous experience such as the magical line:

While the still morn went out with sandals gray.

But what of the famous passage regarding St. Peter and the corruption of the church?

The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed. . . .

Is this passage poetry merely, and in so far as it "heightens consciousness"? It certainly was the expression of a moral passion in its author, and Mrs. Colum might possibly concede it merit as a "poem of love". But the logical application of the doctrine of anti-morality would be to class it with sermons and editorials.

Not all famous lyrics, let us admit, have made appeal to our concern for moral or speculative or religious matters; some have indeed been almost entirely expressions of sensuous experience. Thus Milton wrote "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" as well as "Lycidas" and *Paradise Lost*. But such lyrics are exceptional. Name over other great lyric poets of the English heritage. Shakespeare in his sonnets? They are crammed with reflection on conduct and fate. "Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, So do our minutes hasten to their end." "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame Is lust in action." "Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth." Do the anti-moralists really prefer the incidental songs in the plays to these sonnets? The seventeenth-century lyrists? There has never been a group of poetic singers more deeply concerned with religion. To name them — Donne, Vaughan, Herbert, even Herrick — is to answer the question.

But the romantics? Their practice is indeed a disproof of the extreme theorists among them. It is said that Wordsworth lost his inspiration in proportion as he became conservative and moral with advancing years; but his great youthful poems are inspired by his private religion of nature-worship. Coleridge? His few great poems stand in contrast to his prose, than which there is nothing more compact of moralizing and philosophy; but even the plot of "The Ancient Mariner" turns on a spiritual conversion – such as it is! Shelley? A propagandist for Godwinian anarchy! Keats, then? Ah yes, his great odes are supreme examples of a genius for conveying sensuous experience, and for this they are things of beauty and a joy forever. But they also express the poet's overwhelming sense of mortal transiency – a sense prophetic of his own untimely death. The Grecian urn was beautiful to him chiefly because the pastoral upon it would remain after he was dead, the melodist happy "for ever piping songs for ever new". The nightingale ought, he felt, to be immortal, so beautiful is its voice. The poet's mistress "dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die". These are the deeper tones that add reflection and human significance to the imagery and carry emotion into the hearts of all who bow to wasting Time. If one criticize the great romantic lyrists adversely, respecting morality or reflection, it will hardly be for omitting them but rather for too often falling short of wisdom.

Great lyrics sing to us of our life as a whole, not merely its experiences of the senses but its problems of action and choice, its hopes for significant purpose, and its inevitable flowering and decay. Science can doubtless tell us much in prose about such matters; but for science is description, correlation, abstraction; for poetry remains the emotional significance of truth. If present-day poets choose not to enrich their verse with such significance, it is their loss and ours; but no advance of science can deprive the poet who desires it of his age-old heritage.

We conclude that when a great poet deals with attitudes dealt with by scientists and philosophers abstractly, and therefore prosaically, he breathes into them their passionate significance for life.

V. *Drama and Morality*

But what of the drama? It may occur to the reader that the dramatic poet is forbidden to speak directly in terms of reflection; and it will be admitted that when he lets his characters be his mouthpieces in such matters he runs a great risk of artistic offense. (I should not, however, have the anti-moralist's dogmatic temerity to forbid such things. Aristophanes did them beautifully; Shaw does them now with occasional artistic brilliance – yes, even Shaw. I merely note the obvious danger in attempting them.)

But if the dramatist cannot directly moralize, he is the poet who can deal with greatest concentration of power with human actions. (Great novels are great poems, but they are necessarily more diffuse.) The logic of these actions for the dramatist is the plot, which Aristotle called the chief thing in drama. Plot must be conceived as not merely a scenario of visible incidents, but as the tracing of the springs of action to their source in character, the interweaving of influences, the conflict of moral impulses, and the interference of natural forces. Poetic imagination shows its highest genius not in poignant lyric song but in the construction of such a plot, that shall rouse and resolve the profoundest emotions of our hearts. That this is the highest achievement of the drama is at all events manifest in Shakespeare as well as Sophocles.

But the emotions roused by great tragedy are not the primitive reactions of our animal nature. Native fear and pity, hate and lust, are the effects sought by melodrama. Tragedy, while utilizing them at times, transcends them by appealing to the reflection and imaginative understanding of the intelligent spectator. The great dramatic poet is not merely a purveyor of thrills but a profound speculator upon human life. He must see our nature in the round and concern himself with all its significant qualities. To do this he must get away from himself and become objective, so that in this respect he is closer in spirit to the scientist than to the romantic lyrist. The introversion of the latter makes great drama impossible for him, as may be seen by examining the many attempts at tragedy made by poets in the nineteenth century.

The dramatist must treat not merely the stock-in-trade of ordinary playwrights – ambition, amorousness, jealousy – superficially and conventionally; it is not enough even for him to utilize the latest research of psychology and the case histories of the psychiatrists. Even wide experience with men and women, intuitive insight, and the power to convey his insight to the stage will bring him only to the second rank. Drama, to be great, must be built upon moral meaning. Its fundamental problem is the profound and never-ending struggle behind passion between our animality and our moral intelligence. There is no simple formula to settle this spiritual duel, and the dramatist finds none. Indeed tragedy arises as a direct result of the fact that the fight can never be wholly won. External accident often plays its part in tragedy; but the drama, to be great, must be more a struggle of character than a calamity of circumstance. Tragedy, in its dealings with character, thus becomes the convincing and penetrating portrayal of this struggle in a great spirit, carried on till death.

Tragedy becomes ethical, then, not by recommending programs or rules of conduct but through showing us by example the complexity and profundity of the war we must all wage to be truly human, and the great way of fighting.

Thus Shakespeare, though he never preaches, not only conveys experience but interprets it. We are told on the authority of a great critic and poet that others abide our question, he is free. The assertion is not wholly true. He never leaves his sympathies in doubt between good and evil. His men and women are seldom utter saints or villains: they are the more believable for that. But their goodness is made admirable, their evil, hateful. The central problems in the tragedies are not solved, and hence arises the tragic outcome. But he makes clear what he believed that men and women should seek, regardless of the outcome. His beliefs in such moral matters occasionally seem to us limited by the special spirit of his time; but such limitations are amazingly slight. His ethical position remains sound after three centuries.

If we in our sphere follow the scientist in his, and base our doctrines upon the facts, we shall, I am convinced, find "morality" and "truth" inseparable from and essential to great poetry, both of the past and of our own day. And we may conclude that the student of humane letters need not greatly exercise himself lest the advance of science overwhelm him. On the contrary he may welcome all truly scientific investigation, confident that it will prove in intellectual terms the value of his studies.

It is half a century since Arnold made his defense of humane letters, and some of his observations have lost their point, but his conclusion might have been written yesterday:

> If letters should lose their place in education, we shall be brought back to them by our wants and aspirations. And a poor humanist may possess his soul in patience, neither strive nor cry, admit the energy and brilliancy of the partisans of physical science, and their present favor with the public, to be far greater than his own, and still have a happy faith that the nature of things works silently on behalf of the studies which he loves, and that, while we shall all have to acquaint ourselves with the great results reached by modern science, and to give ourselves as much training in its disciplines as we can conveniently carry, yet the majority of men will always require humane letters; so much the more, as they have the more and the greater results of science to relate to the need in man for conduct, and to the need in him for beauty.

Arthur J. Penty: 1875–1937

GRAHAM CAREY

ARTHUR PENTY is dead. We had, in the February number of THE AMERICAN REVIEW, an appraisal from his pen of Belloc's *The Restoration of Property*. The same issue announced his death on January nineteenth. Gilbert Chesterton died last summer, and now it is Arthur Penty. Another great defender of the humanity of human beings has gone, another upholder of the tradition of real liberty, and therefore a supporter of all those things upon which real liberty nourishes itself – the distribution of productive property, the guild, the just price.

Arthur Penty spent his life in using his phenomenally clear mind for the clarification of the economic and financial muddle in which contemporary England finds itself. He was not satisfied merely to study and analyze the contemporary situation, though he did that admirably, but studied those historical causes of which the contemporary situation is an effect. To do this effectively he had to get inside the skins of the people of the past, to recognize their acts as the results of human motives and human ideals. He had to understand far more than the materialist historian or the worshipper of efficiency in history usually takes the trouble to understand. And because he thus could understand the mental causes of historic facts as well as their technical causes, he was able to throw a great flood of light on history, a light to which the average academic historian is quite blind. And because he was able to sympathize with peoples of the past, to see their acts as those of rational animals, he was, of course, put down by the professional academics as a mediaevalist, a romantic, and one who wished to "turn back the hands of the clock". But a study of his *A Guildsman's Interpretation of History* will show him as a writer who can make history "make sense" in a way rare among professional historians.

Penty's truly independent mind, independent because always concentrated upon the realities of things, rather than upon their outward appearances, understood thoroughly that saying of Aristotle's "Names are the consequents of Things". For this reason he never, as far as I know, called himself a Distributist. He was very shy of labels, knowing how easy it is to substitute the manipulation of labels for the manipulation of true concepts. Labels, to Penty, were dangerous, because to use them properly, as convenient handles for thoughts, requires a perpetual intellectual effort which few of us are willing to exert. He knew too well the meaning of the sigh of relief which we so often give, as we pigeonhole a person or a program. He knew that it means "Thank Heaven, now I don't have to *think* about that any more!" Too often the label marks the death of thought.

But although he refused to call himself by any group-name, particularly by one which he may have felt was in danger of being given too narrow an application, he was heart and soul with the leaders of the Return to Sanity. If the Means they chose were not always his, and that was as it should be, their Ends were always his Ends.

And just as he sacrificed the convenience of labelling himself, so he sacrificed the convenience of labelling other people. His interest was in reality, not the building of a pretty system of labelled pigeonholes. He knew that there is error in us all, and that all of us hold at least some truths. He cared not at all for the authority of the name signed to a truth. He did not quote merely the men with whom he agreed, and not quote others. Argument based upon the dicta of human authorities is the weakest kind of argument. And he was just as apt to quote Trotsky, when Trotsky stated a truth in a particularly striking phrase, as to quote Ruskin or Belloc or Aquinas. To Arthur Penty a truth is a truth, though it be spoken by an idiot or a devil. This habit of his of quoting with approval from all sorts of sources must have made disconcerting reading for those who go by the label, and may well be one of the reasons why he was not more widely read. But he did not write for people to whom names are of greater significance than the things they signify. He wrote for people who are willing to make the effort of doing some hard thinking. Those were the minds to which he made his appeal, and to such minds he did not appeal in vain.

Penty distinguished clearly between the use and the abuse of things. He has been criticized as one who attacked good and useful instruments, such as money and machinery, but he never attacked the proper use of these things, but their abuse. His standard of judgement was a simple one. A thing is used properly if it serves man, the whole man, and helps him to a really happy life. A thing is abused if it exploits man, and reduces his chances of a happy life.

He did not attack money, but the abuse of money. The notion that money is intrinsically fertile leads directly to its abuse. Usury, the paying of interest on *unproductive* loans, is justified on the theory of the fertility of money, the idea that blood can be squeezed out of stones. But usury is the abuse of money, not its use, and the test again is human happiness. Neither the usurers nor their victims are normal or happy people.

And similarly, he never attacked the use of mechanical instruments merely because they were powerful or complex. Machinery, as such, is neither good nor bad. He knew that simple instruments may be used for the exploitation of man by man as well as elaborate ones. He draws our attention particularly to the plight of the weavers in England just before the introduction of steam, when the worst features of industrialism existed in factories where the work was all done on simple hand looms. And he knew that complex instruments may be used for the betterment of mankind as well as simple ones. The most powerful and ingeniously contrived engines are used in the physical laboratories of great universities, and inflict no harm upon those that work them.

He saw no meaning in the question: "Are you for or against Machinery?" But he insisted on the importance of constantly asking: "Is or is not this particular machine for or against me, and my fellows?" The machine, wrote Penty in one of his first books, is like Fire, a good servant but a bad master. Like a Fire, to make sure that it shall be servant rather than master, it must be dealt with rationally, not emotionally. The man who lumps all machines together under a single label, whether he does so to worship or condemn, acts emotionally not realistically. Machines, like men, must be judged upon their individual merits. "Does this bombing-plane, this sewing-machine, this machine-gun, this microscope, moving-picture projector, this motorcycle, by its actual operation, and under the actual conditions of its operation, increase or decrease human happiness?" That is the intelligent man's approach to the problem of mechanization. And Penty, in several of his books, has taught his readers how best to ask and answer these questions. And at every point his method of judging the desirability of a specific mechanism turns on the question of ultimate human happiness.

Penty was not only a thinker, he was also an artist. Throughout his life he practised the art of architecture. It is characteristic of his whole mind that most of his work was in the field of domestic architecture, the building for human beings of human habitations. He saw at the center of the social structure the normal human family as its unit, and at the center of architecture he saw the material structure that houses that unit, the family dwelling. And it is something of a symbol that the only specifically architectural book he ever wrote was called *The Elements of Domestic Design*.

As an economist, as an artist, and as a lover of what is human in humanity, he saw that at bottom the problem of production and the problem of art are one and the same. The art critic who does not broaden his view to embrace economics will have as distorted and partial an idea of art, as the economist will have of labor, who disregards the humanity of workers and the quality of the things workers make. Production is good when the producer in his production functions as a whole man, as a normal man, as a human being. Economic problems arise whenever man the producer is not fully human; not able to put the whole of himself into his work. Artistic problems arise for the same reason.

If we believe that art concerns itself merely with the beautiful, and that economics concerns itself merely with the useful, we will separate two aspects of things which cannot properly be separated. For the useless things so often made by "artists" in studios are not fully beautiful, and cannot be, because the fundamental question of use has been neglected. And the ugly "utilities" so often made by "hands" in factories are not fully useful, and cannot be, because the fundamental question of quality has been neglected. Everything really well made has *both* use and beauty. Its full beauty depends upon its use, and its full use upon its beauty.

Economic production and art are healthy when they are one. Both become unhealthy when they are separated.

Arthur Penty saw the enormous importance of these truths, he taught others to see them, and he struggled to put them into practice. As an instrument for the realization of his ideal of human productive integrity, he worked for the re-establishment of Guilds. A disorganized society allowed men to produce without being masters of their own production. By the development of Guilds he believed that men could reorganize production in such a way as to be able to produce in a fully human way. The economic unit of society must be able to control its own members in order to assure the complete humanity of those members and consequently the humanity of their products. Guilds had in the past succeeded in raising producers for use to the status of artists, fully human producers of useful things, and Guilds, he believed, could succeed in performing the same task in the future.

What had been the solution of this problem in the past could be its solution again, if the underlying principles were understood by men of good will. Penty was, of course, accused of mediaevalism for hammering away at contemporary problems with such a mediaeval word, but he was not dealing with a word but with a basic concept. He used the old word in default of a better, but the idea in his mind was one fully applicable to the complexities of the modern economic problem. His preoccupation with the idea of Guilds shows in the titles of many of his books: *A Guildsman's Interpretation of History*, *The Restoration of the Gild System*, *Guilds and the Social Crisis*, and *Guilds, Trade, and Agriculture.*

It is hard to do justice to a mind and spirit such as Arthur Penty's in the brief space of such a notice as this. How can we sum up such a man?

He was one who *saw* with amazing clarity into the realities of things, and who could show those realities to others.

He was a courageous and tireless fighter for the good life that he knew to be desirable, and believed to be possible, for human beings.

He was an artist who knew that an artist is nothing but a fully human producer of useful things, and knowing this he wanted the greatest possible number of producers to be artists.

He was an inspiring leader among those who question the validity of Industrial-Capitalism's claim to be the road to human happiness, but who see in Socialism and in Communism extensions rather than corrections of its basic evils.

He was an architect. He planned and built houses for individual human families. He built them with attention to use — to human needs — and in them he achieved great beauty. He planned a better world for all mankind to dwell in, and this great plan also was founded on basic human needs. The building of such a world is for those that come after him to set their hands to. But Arthur Penty has already laid the first stones.

Editorial Note.—When Arthur Joseph Penty died in his sleep on January 19th at his home in Isleworth, Middlesex, England, at the age of sixty-two, enlightened social criticism lost one of its major modern figures; a loss which will be particularly felt by readers of THE AMERICAN REVIEW, where most of the products of his pen during his last three years appeared. According to present plans there will be one more book by Arthur Penty, made up chiefly of his AMERICAN REVIEW contributions and published by Sheed and Ward. The book is scheduled to appear later in the present year.

For the convenience of readers interested in Penty's work (there is, curiously, no entry under his name in *Who's Who?*) we give below a list of his books, with their publishers. The first three titles and the last are now out of print. The American Review Book Shop carries in stock all the Penty books that are in print (except *The Elements of Domestic Design*), and can usually supply second-hand copies of the others.

Books by A. J. Penty

The Restoration of the Gild System, 1906 (Swan & Sonnenschein)
Old Worlds for New, 1917 (Allen & Unwin)
Guilds and the Social Crisis, 1919 (Allen & Unwin)
A Guildsman's Interpretation of History, 1920 (Allen & Unwin)
Guilds, Trade, and Agriculture, 1921 (Allen & Unwin)
Post-Industrialism, 1922. Preface by G. K. Chesterton (Allen & Unwin)
Toward a Christian Sociology, 1923 (Allen & Unwin)
Protection and the Social Problem, 1926 (Methuen)
Elements of Domestic Design, 1930 (Architectural Press)
Means and Ends, 1932 (Faber & Faber)
Communism and the Alternative, 1932 (Student Christian Movement Press)

The Perfection Principle

Reason and Unreason in Modern Thought

R. W. Bretall

In that revulsion from Modernism which is claiming the energies of so many penetrating thinkers today, there is liable to lurk an ambiguity which, unless cleared up, may prove disastrous to the whole traditionalist line of thought, wrecking it on the reefs of inner contradiction. Within one issue of The American Review (December, 1936), two seemingly incompatible charges are brought against the modern spirit: on the one hand it is irrationalistic, exalts "life" for the sake of life, and has nowhere a sure anchor in criteria or first principles (pp. 252-3). On the other hand, its most significant vice is the domination of experience by "theory" (p. 222). How can these charges be made harmonious?

The late Mr. A. J. Penty, whose discriminating article on "The Degeneration of Socialism" contains and amplifies the latter charge, has recognized that the two must be conceived as fitting together, however contradictory they may appear. "Socialists," he said, "suffer from a total incapacity for weighing evidence, or discriminating between ideas, and are governed entirely by their *emotions* and *abstract theory*." But psychologically or otherwise – is this credible? If we analyze that complex of ideas in which Liberalism, Progressivism, Leftism (use whatever name we will) consists, I think we shall find that it is.

The leading motive, which is also the fundamental error, of the modern movement, has been many times pointed out: it lies simply in the deification of man – endowing the creature with the attributes of the Creator. By no one was this motive more clearly identified or better expressed than by that early and severe critic of "the Renaissance philosophy", T. E. Hulme:

> We introduce into human things the *Perfection* that properly belongs only to the divine, and thus confuse both human and divine things by not clearly separating them. To illustrate the position, imagine a man situated at a point in a plane, from which roads radiate in various directions. Let this be the plane of actual existence. We place *Perfection* where it should not be – on this human plane. As we are painfully aware that nothing *actual* can be *perfect*, we imagine the perfection to be not where we are, but some distance along one of the roads. Most frequently, in literature at any rate, we imagine an impossible *perfection* along the road of sex; but any one can name the other roads for himself. The abolition of some discipline and restriction would enable us, we imagine, to progress along one of these roads. The fundamental error is that of placing Perfection in *humanity*, thus giving rise to that bastard thing Personality, and all the bunkum that follows from it. (*Speculations*, pp. 32-33.)

Equally valuable is the following bit of psychological analysis:

> By the perverted rhetoric of Rationalism, your natural instincts are suppressed and you are converted into an agnostic. [But] just as in the case of the other instincts, Nature has her revenge. The instincts that have their right and proper outlet in religion must come out in some

other way. You don't believe in a God, so you begin to believe that man is a god. You don't believe in Heaven, and so you begin to believe in a heaven on earth. In other words, you get romanticism. The concepts that are right and proper in their own sphere are spread over, and so mess up, falsify, and blur the clear outlines of human experience. It is like pouring a pot of treacle over the dinner table. Romanticism then, and this is the best definition I can give of it, is split religion. (*Ibid.*, p. 118.)

If we look about in formal philosophy for an example of the "spilling" process – or the process whereby the Ideal is lowered into the plane of actual human existence – we shall find a fairly good one in the transition from Kant to Hegel. In his procedure, Kant was more faithful to experience and what is indisputably *given* to us therein than any other modern philosopher. To discover the presuppositions of this experience was his quite modest aim. The result of his investigations, however, seemed to imply something much more grandiose – *viz.*, that all experience forms a system, from the general nature of which its particular content necessarily follows. But for Kant this system remained an ideal, while for Hegel it became "a positive state of his own consciousness"*. "Kant would not deny an absolute idea capable of effecting the reconciliation which Hegel requires. On the contrary he would say that his *antinomies*, and the whole tendency of his critical philosophy, pointed in that direction; but then he would draw a distinction between that idea itself and what it is for us. He would say that for us (except in a practical way) it is incapable of effecting any reconciliation." (J. C. Meredith, *Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, p. xxix.) For Kant the Idea is still transcendent, and so his "system" is never fully closed: future experience may hold surprises for us which cannot be worked into that synthesis which appears best and most inclusive at present. But Hegel has mounted the ladder of categories to the Absolute Idea once for all. The circle is therefore closed: he is free to apply his Absolute Idea with the utmost abandon; whereas Kant can apply it only where it has already proved itself. Venturing beyond this, the Kantian's confidence disappears, and he will have to interrogate experience.* The mind does tend in the direction of One Coherent Plan. Kant would call this One Plan a "necessary assumption", and would refuse to admit that we know any more of it than just *that* it is. Hegel, on the other hand, knows *what* it is – knows its content thoroughly. The result is that

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* In the recently published *Philosophical Fragments* of Sören Kierkegaard are to be found many sly references to this characteristic of Hegelianism, upon which contemporary followers of "the System" particularly prided themselves: "To be sure, our age is positive and understands what is positive; Socrates on the other hand was negative. . . ." (p. 17.) Elsewhere Kierkegaard's criticism is violent and open: "[This] despised sophism, the devil only knows how, has become the secret of genuine speculation,

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and the *to-a-certain degree mode of thought* (that travesty on tolerance which mediates everything without petty scrupulosity), regarded as negative by the ancients, has now become positive; and what the ancients regarded as positive, the passion for distinctions, has now become a childish folly." (pp. 75-76.)

* Something of Kant's attitude may be gathered from the following passage: "Once we are outside the circle of experience, we can be sure of not being *contradicted* by experience. The charm of extending our knowledge is so great that nothing short of encountering a direct contradiction can suffice to arrest us in our course; and this can be avoided if we are careful in our fabrications – which none the less will still remain fabrications. . . ." (*Critique of Pure Reason*, Kemp Smith's translation, p. 46.)

the One Plan becomes a *human* thing, accommodated to our finite understanding.

One of the most conspicuous results, when philosophy thus takes an immanental turn, is to do away with "correspondence" and make "coherence" the sole criterion of truth. The fact is, of course, that both criteria must be employed alternately. "Coherence", we may suppose, represents "the divine point of view"; but men are men, not God, and certain it is that "correspondence with reality" is an ineradicable characteristic of anything that can appear as true to our finite consciousness. But Modernism deifies man: it endows him with an absolutely synoptic vision, from which all truth follows as the proposition that the sum of the angles of a triangle equals 180 degrees follows from the triangle's definition. Such truth is not for man (except in fields like mathematics which "concern not existence"); but it has been appropriated by man, who, in doing so, forgot his own finitude.

To agree to the truth of this charge it is not necessary even to believe in God; it is necessary only to look deep into the nature of man as he presently is and has been, and realize the fragmentariness of all his attainments and apprehensions. As human beings we are certainly confronted by an imperious host of Ideals which the spirit wills, but which the flesh is powerless to attain. The mistake of every romanticizing philosophy is to confuse the spiritual willing with the actual attainment. This confusion is typically "Idealistic", for it rests on the principle that to be conscious of a limit is already to have transcended it. But "consciousness" of a limit is more than a mere perfunctory recognition of it. To be *really conscious* that we are finite beings is to *act* upon this assumption and to frame our whole philosophy of life in accordance with it – not just to give lip service to it, in order to be immediately "infinite". Thus Hegel's own principle might be followed out to a very different attitude from that which most of his too-eager disciples represent.

With Coherence as his sole criterion of truth, the principles according to which the Modernist does his thinking are bound to be highly abstract in nature. For an abstraction will synthesize a much wider area of experience than a fairly concrete notion, and such synthesis is always the end in view. "Modernistic" thought is thought in which a single Idea is set up to legislate for experience. The Idea does not have to be the Hegelian Idea: it may be almost anything (as long as it is "abstract") and may vary according to the field for which it is intended. In politics it may be Democracy; in Economics, Free Trade or the cult of Progress by Scientific Advance. But whatever it is, its universal sway and the blind adherence given to it are really and literally marks of a certain insanity.

Everyone knows that any theory whatever, no matter how wild, can (with enough distortion) be made to synthesize our experience. The totality of appearances can always be forced into a "self-consistent whole", even if the governing principle of that whole be the *idée fixe* of a madman. Chesterton pointed out (in *Orthodoxy*) what fiendish "rationality" an insane person may exhibit; and indeed the phenomenon is a matter of common acquaintance. Granted his absurd premiss, the victim is able to interpret any occurrence whatever, quite logically, as not merely being consistent with it, but as lending it further support. If he believes that people are plotting against him, and the people deny they are conspirators, then that is precisely what conspirators *would* do, etc. Curing him does not mean rendering his ideas coherent or consistent, for they are already rigidly so, but rather breaking down the isolation of the one wretched "system" that has been allowed to grow and dominate all else, so that a flood of new experience may come in. All of which is just a vivid illustration of this truth – that "the self-consistency of a theory is never a proof of its tenability. Only its harmony with all the phenomena which it directly or indirectly touches can give it a footing. . . ." (Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethics*, Vol. I, p. 288.)

Where do we get the abstract principles which we employ in judgement on a given subject? This question raises a host of possibilities. There is first of all the procedure of the lazy mind which, after cursory glance at the world about it, collects by generalization some principle as obvious as it is inadequate to the complexity of things. Usually such a principle is one of the clichés which the mind has thrust upon it by the society of its time and its whole environment. Such a purely receptive mind is inconsiderable for the history of thought: it never initiates anything, and so can be dismissed. A man in earnest with the empirical method will not be satisfied with a "cursory glance", nor even with an intensive glance which confines itself to his own group and time; he will be impelled continually to correct himself by a wider and wider range of observations, accumulating more and more data. A thinker who proceeds thus empirically is on the right road, although his method may be unimaginative and his progress slow.

But there is another source from which we may draw our principles – one liable to be overlooked by rationalism. No one of us is a "pure thinker"; we all exercise preferences and avoidances which cannot be reduced to a basis in reason. And none of our thinking – along humanistic subjects at least – wholly escapes the influence of these preferences and avoidances. In any case, perennially "liberal" or "advanced" thought seems to fall a particularly easy victim to them. One's theoretical account of a situation becomes merely what one would like that situation to be – its desired or "perfect" form. This type of wish-thinking very often derives its principles from Christianity, but always by abstraction. The external *result* of some Christian virtue is lifted out of its context – separated from the moral and religious discipline which is an absolutely necessary condition of it. Thus separated, the result gives us no genuinely *perfect* state of things at all, but only a pseudo-perfection. Prof. A. E. Taylor (among others) has remarked that most of the liberal-humanitarian schemes for the reconstruction of society set forth a goal which no Christian can recognize as ultimate. "The builders of the vulgar Utopias are all concerned only with providing for the 'heart's desire' of very imperfectly moralized beings, the securing of felicity for men who remain unenlightened and unregenerate. . . . There is no genuine regeneration of society but one which is based throughout on transformation of personal aim and character." (*The Faith of a Moralist*, Vol. I, p. 147.) As Berdyaev says, bread for myself is a material question; bread for my neighbor is a spiritual question – a spiritual question *for myself*, however, not for my neighbor. I may give my neighbor bread – and circuses too – without end, and only degrade him by so doing.

In so far as our "Perfection principle" tends to be merely a projection of human wants and desires (and this tendency can never be wholly avoided), so far it partakes of the materialism of the "natural man". Nearly every one of these principles simulates genuine moral or religious perfection. "Universal peace", for example, has markedly religious overtones; but, as Dr. More has said somewhere, "the peace that passeth all understanding" has very little in common with the "peace" to be established by the latest super-committee at Geneva.

It is all a question of proper boundaries: principles of "perfection" in the economic or political sphere may have some validity, provided they are recognized *as* principles for economic or political life, and not as principles for the whole life of man. There is no conflict unless the principle for one particular sphere tries to swallow up everything else. This is the tendency of "Coherence" – of the One Plan which subsumes all under itself; and, in the end, the only way of checking it is to balance "Coherence" with "Correspondence". Coordinate with the Perfection principle must be recognized another which we may call the Reality principle. For without reference to what is given in immediate experience, there can be no assurance that one principle will not swallow up all the other principles, one super-abstraction all the other abstractions. That "knowledge is tied to the given" is the fact which renders vain all one-sided theories that leave no room for any distinctive and significant variety in experience. If one abandons the given — abandons the Reality principle — he has left no check upon his power of abstraction; everything can be synthesized into the One Coherent Whole, even though every "thing" literally vanishes therein.

We have been assuming the Perfection principle set up to be actually imperfect in character, and we have shown why this is all too likely to be the case. For the sake of argument, however, let us assume man to be capable of laying aside his prejudices and conceiving an "ideal" state of affairs that is really ideal and universally valid for the realm in question; let us conceive him capable of setting up a right and true goal to strive toward. In this case, then, there can be error only in so far as the Ideals which the heart demands are translated *from the axiological into the existential realm* — in so far as they are posited, not just as goals toward which we are morally bound to strive (for as such they are perfectly valid), but as theoretical principles for understanding the *actual* world. Only so far can there be error; but such error there always is, and so prevalent is this error as to deserve the title of the great modern heresy.

To posit an ideal state of things as the clew to understanding men and to the best course of action among them is to think according to the Perfection principle. But this principle holds undisputed sway only in the mind of God or in the ideal realm; when we descend from ideality to actuality, the Perfection principle must be tempered by the Reality principle. It must be understood that the actual state of things and especially of human nature forbids our assuming that the very highest ideals are realizable — forbids our thinking and planning as if they were – though it by no means condones our failure, as individuals, to will them, to strive toward them in every possible way. Idealism can see no sense in this, because it conceives the boundaries of possibility as illusions, to be banished by the activity of Spirit. That the actual world exhibits an absolute unwillingness to conform to its principles makes no difference to idealism: the actual state of things is merely temporary or perverse, and in the end it *must* conform – an apocalyptic notion true as such, but which wreaks confusion when made into a theoretical foundation for present action. The simple *fact* of our finitude remains, however clear may be our duty to *will* that this fact be continually transcended. Modernism may be defined as intoxication with values – an intoxication that blinds men to existence and Necessity, and makes them think that anything is possible.

The concrete way in which the Perfection principle works has been set forth by Mr. Penty and others; but we may add a few examples of our own. One of the first persons to realize the inadequacy of the principle, untempered by consideration of brute Reality, is the statesman; and it is significant in how low esteem the statesman is held by most moderns. They can see, in his temporizing, only a base compromise with the Good and True. It never occurs to them that this temporizing is necessary, or that there can ever be a situation in which the lesser of two evils must be chosen. In this ignoring of Necessity, and in the tendency to treat all theoretical acknowledgment of it as a "falling-away" from Truth, it appears how closely the whole modern viewpoint resembles the famous cult founded by Mrs. Eddy, and how this latter is indeed the logical carrying-out and conclusion of Modernism.

Again, consider the question of universal peace. Certainly universal peace is a value, and even a supreme value, toward which every one should strive. It seems arguable, even further, that we cannot affirm it as a value without at the same time "doing" something, or resolving to do something, to secure it. On the other hand, plainly no one of us can do *everything* to secure it, and evidently society as a whole cannot secure it at the present time. Therefore, as Hartmann argues, universal peace (in the strict, absolute sense) is an "Ought-to-Be", but not an "Ought-to-Do" — since we cannot be held responsible for what in the very nature of the case is impossible for us to achieve. "I ought to do what ought to be, in so far as it 'is' not, and in so far as to make it actual is in my power." (*Ethics*, Vol. I, p. 248.) This condition of the object's being "in my power" should be universalized, when we are seeking our theoretical principle, and we should say: "That ought to be which 'is' not, and which is (at the present time and in the given circumstances) possible of achievement." Nothing that is *im*possible of achievement ought to be here and now, and nothing thus impossible should form any foundation or underlying assumption of our present action.

On the problem of universal peace, this would mean an unqualified condemnation of Pacifism, though not the condemnation of any reasonable efforts at the limitation of armaments or the manufacture of munitions. These latter are things that we can see and handle: the evil connected with them is in plain view, and there is therefore some possibility of getting at it and clearing it away. All such specific efforts stand out in sharp contrast to the vague and abstract Pacifism which continually talks of "doing away with war". To realize that the Kellogg Pact is merely a piece of impossible and irresponsible idealism is to clear the ground for more practical considerations – not how war can be eliminated, but how it can be limited or controlled. Some thinking along this line has already taken place. (*Cf.* Hoffman Nickerson on "Democracy, War, and Peace," in the *Criterion*, April, 1935, pp. 351-363. The same thesis is developed at length in Mr. Nickerson's book *Can We Limit War?* published by Stokes, 1934.)

One of the best examples of how the Perfection principle operates, especially in its "abstractive" aspect, is furnished by the question of political authority. The widespread belief in democracy as the ideal form of organization, valid for all nations at any period of their history, rests in the end upon one very abstract principle – *viz.*, that autonomy is better than heteronomy. In argument, Liberals nearly always fall back on this idea – that under democracy people rule themselves, whereas under other forms a few people rule all the others, and that therefore we can *deduce* democracy to be the supreme political form. Very seldom, in the mind of the Liberal, do any considerations arise as to whether or not a given people may be ready for democracy – whether, in assuming it to be capable of autonomy, we may not simply be controverting the facts.

It is true that he may have evolutionary conceptions: he therefore admits that policies and principles were applicable once (say, in the Middle Ages) which are no longer applicable today, as an instance, he may admit that the sovereignty, of the secular power, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was the only means for breaking the sovereignty of Rome; but today secular sovereignty stands on the other side of the fence. It represents what is left of the old "established" order, not what is revolutionary, and so our duty is to do away with it. The notion of Perpetual Progress, itself, thus becomes the most abstract and static of formulas. The admissions as to the past are never really extended into the present: they remain academic only.

When he turns to social and political life as it exists today, our Liberal forgets all about reality and necessity, and works only with the abstract notion of a "perfect order of things". The abstract schemework must be laid out, even if this schemework cannot possibly be filled with meaning in the present state of things. Everyone is given the right to vote, because this secures his "freedom". That this freedom is extremely abstract, and means almost nothing to the "common man" who finds himself concretely and economically *un*free, is not reckoned with — or, if it is, it is treated as a secondary matter to be worked out *after* the ideal framework has been set up. First the universal, then the particular to fill the universal — not (as sanity dictates) universal and particular considered always in the same view and in consonance with each other.

Finally, I should like to come nearer home and suggest that the more violent opponents of "loan capital" are not entirely free from the error we have been discussing – the error of ignoring the actual. In any discussion of economic issues two points of view are likely to come out with great clearness: (1) The viewpoint of the social reformer – who, whatever may be the character of the reforms he suggests, always speaks as if those reforms could be put into practice overnight and the whole social structure reorganized. Opposing this (2) is the viewpoint of the practical man (an industrialist, farmer, or small tradesman) who sees only the present state of things, and how he can best act *assuming* this state to be what it is. And this latter point of view simply cannot be ignored. Justifiable rage against the *ethics* of capitalism must not be allowed to blind us to the fact that its *methods* (efficiency of organization, large-scale production, etc.) must be taken account of by any economic reconstruction of the future. We can (if we will) negate the *spirit* of the past or of any section of it; but in trying to negate the solid achievements of the past, as rooted in the existential order, we are liable to find ourselves confronting Necessity. Thinking that ignores this confrontation stamps itself as unreal; thinking that takes account of it, and seeks the best way out *under* the circumstances, is generally vital and effective.

We should now be able to answer the question posed at the beginning of this essay: how can modern thought be accused simultaneously of two conflicting tendencies – rationalism and irrationalism, "abstract" thinking and no thinking at all? And the answer is – with the same propriety with which Aristotle advised us to avoid both extremes in any case and to seek always the Mean. When one extreme is chosen, the other is immediately necessary to balance it. The more one yields in the flux of things and slips into the passing stream of consciousness, the more necessary it becomes to have *some* principle, *some* fixed and static criterion, whereby we may at least simulate the fulfillment of our destiny as rational beings, judging and choosing, exercising preference and avoidance.

But the balance of universal and particular in which consists reality will assert itself, and the more man enters into the flux, the more "ideal" and abstract do his principles become. On the other hand, intellectualism will breed irrationalism. Man, defined as pure Thinker by Descartes, issues forth in modern Germany as one who "thinks with his blood". The Fascisms of our time are only very violent reactions against the inhuman calculations and hard rationalism of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century liberal-democracy. The Utilitarians were as far from center as any movement in force today: and these movements are only *in* force because the spirit of Utilitarianism had so long and unholy a triumph.

A constructive view of life will see universal and particular, form and content, concept and sense datum, as thoroughly relative to each other: this means also that they are necessary to each other, that the particular is "unreal" without its universal aspect and that the universal is unreal without its particular aspect: universals and particulars are members of One Whole in which neither has the pre-eminence. On this basis we see that it is impossible, in the very nature of things, for a man to live the "purely particular" life –

the life of emotion and sensation, lacking unity and synthesis – the life that is verily (as A. E. Taylor puts it) "just one damned thing after another". Particular actions will inevitably seek principles to support them; but these principles may be more or less abstract.

The "modern man" does not resign the attempt at knowledge, he is still driven by the human impulsion to understand. But he seeks to know and understand in the easiest possible way, which means the most abstract way. He tends to set up a principle so general in nature, that it cannot possibly suffer disproof at the bar of experience. This principle will be capable of subsuming all particular appearances under itself, whatever these appearances may turn out to be:

> The monistic theories derived ultimately from observation not only have behind them the urgency of the physical senses, but provide a neat tidy sort of world in which the mind seems able to evade the insoluble paradoxes of experience. If all things flow from a single principle with the purring regularity of a machine, then, with this first cause before me, I can fit everything that happens into a series of syllogisms with no need of examining my successive premisses. On the other hand, if from the data of intuition I infer a transcendent dualism of God and Ideas operating upon the disorder of Necessity, then there is always in the world an incalculable residue of unreason to take into account. I cannot by a bare process of logic pretend to explain what is or predict what will be, but must hold the mind always open to the accession of fresh facts and new combinations. I must abide forever in a state of mental docility, with my lesson never fully learned. In such a world the sceptic and the Platonist and the Christian are equally at ease, but the rationalist is an

outcast; and against such a state of pupilage the intellect rebels with the pride of Satan. (*The Sceptical Approach to Religion*, pp. 98-99.)

The vitality of all thought is to be measured largely by the closeness of correlation between its universal and particular, formal and material aspects. Thought should move from an intuited datum to a tentative explanation and quickly back again, in order that the explanation may be checked by reference to a further range of data, and that these further data may be synthesized into a further tentative explanation. The process is a continual shuttling back and forth between the manifold given of experience on the one hand, and the synthetic, unifying tendency of *theory* on the other — between the demands of "Correspondence" and of "Coherence", between what is independent of us for its existence and what is constructed by the rational, creative activity of man. The method of modernistic Rationalism is very different from this. It does not shuttle back and forth between experience and rational coherence: any such procedure is too pedestrian for it.

Instead, the Modern will attain the heaven of knowledge at one bound: he will take one brief glance at experience, or (more often) merely consult his own projected desires, his vision of a perfect world, a world as it ought to be; and on the basis of this he will posit a single formula (be it the Absolute or metaphysical Relativism) which embraces everything, and according to which, as a preconceived notion, the elements of experience may be sorted and classified.

One who adopts this latter attitude has no need to be humble or dissatisfied. One who rejects, it on the other hand, and accepts the Mean between chaotic experience and irresponsible theory, will find none of his problems solved beforehand, or any assurance against a life of perpetual uncertainty. But it may be that problems are not solved from the "spectator's balcony" or by those who "warm both hands before the fire of life", but rather in the process of living itself, by "those who strive and suffer, the players, the makers, the poets, the saints". (Thomas Gilby, *Poetic Experience*, p. 107.) In this case it will not be useless to have cleared away certain stubborn misconceptions.

The English Press

Jane Soames

One of the most fruitful sources of misunderstanding between the United States and Great Britain is the identity of language. An American visiting Europe who finds himself in a country where he does not understand the speech has received as it were a warning signal — these people are different! But in England he has the illusion of similarity because the language is the same; and it is a dangerous illusion because the great differences between the two cultures which will certainly strike him come as a shock, unexpectedly. This truth is beginning to be realized on both sides of the Atlantic; but one aspect of it was brought home to me afresh the other day by the remark of an American friend staying in London. He said, "I can make nothing of your Press. I buy three or four papers and try to get at what is happening, but there's nothing in them. They don't give you the news, and they don't give you comment upon the news. Now our papers may be violent, they may even be what you call vulgar, but at any rate we do get the facts; and we also get editorials which aren't just a string of platitudes but real expression of opinion upon one side or the other."

Now I think my friend's very just remarks express what is felt by most Americans who have occasion to read the English newspapers; and since their most convenient medium for getting first-hand European news is the English Press it is important that they should realize the reason for the differences which strike them so forcibly.

Only two great Powers devoted to the principle of democratic government remain in Europe today — France and Great Britain. And only those two great Powers possess what is even nominally a free Press. In Italy, in the German Reich, and in Soviet Russia the Press is under direct governmental control; there is not only a considerable censorship upon the publication of fact, there is also an absolute prohibition against the expression of views and opinions not acceptable to the rulers of the country, and any attempt to evade this rigid control is punishable by law. It is not only a question of suppressing the offending matter; the writer and editor of it make themselves liable to severe penalties, to imprisonment, and even in extreme cases to death. Now everybody knows this: every reader of the German, Russian, and Italian newspapers is fully conscious that he is being presented with one view and one view only — that inconvenient facts and opinions are not allowed to appear. But what is not so clearly recognized is that in Great Britain there is also a Press censorship, none the less powerful for being unofficial; which accounts for what would otherwise appear inexplicable reticences and omissions.

The most obvious proof that such a censorship exists is the uniformity of English newspapers. The whole daily Press of England says substantially the same thing about what it reports — all the newspapers put the same degree of emphasis upon sport, film stars, Royalty, racing news, and the other amusement features which make up so large a proportion of their matter. They do indeed contain what purport to be expressions of opinion, but these upon analysis will be found to differ surprisingly little; and an unbroken silence is maintained upon matters which it is decided not to mention. The circle is complete, there are no "revelations". With only the most unimportant and rare exceptions our Press not only reports and emphasizes but omits the same things.

The British public is accustomed to this uniformity; and what would seem to an educated foreign reader a lack of diversity, a stifling sameness of opinion, is in our country taken for granted. This is in part due to the patriotism of the English, but not entirely. The mass of the population sincerely believes that the Press is uncensored and that what it reports makes up the sum of daily significant happenings and opinions – whereas in its very homogeneity lies the proof that much is unreported, unemphasized, uncriticized, and therefore unknown. Yet there is a minority which would like freer expression of opinion, and a much more unrestricted news service. It is a desire quite unrealizable under present conditions, and that for two reasons: first because the Press is in effect censored by the operation of the Law of Libel; and secondly because the newspapers censor themselves. In most cases the two tendencies work together, and though in some the Law of Libel is felt to be onerous, on the whole it is taken for granted.

It is important to realize that this so-called "Law" is (like much of the English legal system) really a large body of legal decisions grafted one upon the other, never codified or reduced to order; and has now (to quote an eminent King's Counsel) "become so technical and complicated in its structure or lack of structure, so uncertain in its operations, and so all-embracing and capricious in its results that few writers or publishers can contemplate without dismay the risk of practical experience of its working". And in any action for libel not only the author of the words complained of, but the printer, publisher, and editor are all equally liable. It is obvious that this is an extremely strong defense against the publication of matter at all likely to come under suspicion of contravention of this law – the more so because there is no final and accurate definition of what constitutes a libel. In effect that depends upon the decision of the Judge in court, and no one can feel that he has an absolutely clear and watertight defense, *even if his facts are proved*. In a very remarkable article published recently in *The Political Quarterly*, Mr. D. N. Pritt, K.C., gives it as his considered opinion that

> All recent experience shows that freedom in discussion is so severely limited that critical writing has become a dangerous trade. Any attempt to write a full critical account of, or comment on, say, trusts, armaments, company promotions, food adulteration, conditions of labor or slums, or any big industry; of the public school system, or of Colonial administration, will confront the writer who nourishes any hope or desire of having his comments published with difficulties at every step. He may think that, as Libel is in its essence an attack on the reputation of individual persons or companies he is at liberty to criticize a class or a system or a whole branch of industry: but he will soon learn that if any one person or corporation is sufficiently prominent in the class, the system, or the industry, to be thought to be the target

of criticism, an action of libel by that person or corporation will be very likely to succeed. . . .

In effect the Law of Libel is an extremely flexible and efficient instrument in the hands of the Executive to prevent the publication of matter which it does not desire to see the light, and operates as a strict censorship upon the publication of anything damaging to the Government or the existing state of affairs in general. The extent to which it stifles the Press is proved by the very remarkable fact that although the grave national crisis in connection with the proposed marriage of the late King, Edward VIII, was discussed in the fullest terms in the American Press not only for weeks but months before it came to a head, not one word on the subject appeared in any English newspaper. The American weekly, *Time*, has a large sale in London; and during all last autumn it contained pictures and articles dealing in the frankest way with the private life of the late King — but not one echo of those pictures and articles percolated into the productions of Fleet Street, though they were read and discussed all over London. Then, when the position began to be considered dangerous, *Time* also was censored, though not in any official way. The English distributors simply tore out the pages dealing with the King, and sold the paper thus mutilated. They may have been given and very likely were given an official hint that it would be as well to do so; but only a Judge's order given in open Court could have compelled them to such a course, and no such Judge's order was ever made because it was never asked for.

The thing was managed unofficially. Of course all London was perfectly well aware of the position —

for what appears in the Press and what appears in private conversation have no connection – but those (and inevitably they are the majority) who depend upon the newspapers for their information upon public affairs were entirely ignorant of what was happening, and the news of the King's proposed marriage and the question of his abdication came to them as a complete revelation.

Now this suppression of important news is not due only to the long arm of the Law of Libel. The owners of the Press are also responsible. There is no opposition Press in England because our newspapers are owned by a small ring of immensely wealthy and powerful capitalists who have no desire to encourage critical writing or the publication of inconvenient facts and opinions. This is also true of the American Press to a very large extent, but the size of the country and the strong egalitarian tradition make it impossible to impose such a tight control as in England. It must be remembered that the same newspaper can be put on sale at the same time in London and the North: the great trusts buy up or crowd out the local paper, and all the country falls into the hands of the same little group. If therefore we know who owns the Press we know what to expect from it. The object of these large financial groups is not primarily the dissemination of news, but the acquisition of dividends. The amount of capital sunk in newspaper undertakings is very large and it has not been so invested in order that the British public should have rapid, accurate, and impartial information, but so as to produce the highest possible rate of interest for its owners. Nor is that rate of interest primarily derived from the amount of circulation. It is probably roughly true to say that the receipts from the sale of a newspaper alone would barely cover the cost of production. The profit accrues from advertising. The reading matter of the paper therefore comes to pay a doubtless important but essentially secondary rôle in the eyes of the owners of the Press – whose main object must be of course to make a profit on their investments. And this consideration has a very important bearing on the editorial side of newspaper production also, both direct and indirect.

The owners of the Press, as very large capitalists, are unwilling to permit the publication of views, opinions, and news presented in such a way as to be at all likely to jeopardize the continuance of industrial capitalism. And since the Press is now practically all controlled by a small group of financiers in London, that is not difficult. To realize to what extent this is true one has only to cross the Channel. Paris produces more than three times as many daily papers as London, and there are at least a dozen provincial journals which carry great weight and are wholly independent. It is thus impossible to maintain uniformity – every view and every opinion has it organ – the diversity is amazing. You may buy on the same newsstand a paper of open Royalist sympathies, another Communist, another Liberal, another Republican. The big capitalist interests have of course their organs, with far larger circulations than the less wealthy independent newspapers, but the whole press is not concentrated in a few hands as in England; nor have we in this country that salutary tradition of egalitarianism which balances the power of capitalism in the United

States. With us the unification of control is practically complete, it works in and with the government of the country, the Kings of Industrial Capitalism censor and inspire every line and every picture which appears in the Press – with the exception of *The Daily Worker*, the circulation of which is so small as to make its effect insignificant.

It is perhaps here illuminating to refer to the classic definition of libel – as a statement tending to bring its object into hatred, ridicule, or contempt. It will I think be hard to find many instances of real hatred and contempt for the established order in the English Press, or even lively comment upon it – but the fact is in part obscured by the frequent appearance of ridicule. Institutions and public men are continually caricatured and laughed at, for the English character is founded upon humor and demands it in the Press as in every manifestation of life; but this is not criticism in the sense that it attempts to create a current of opinion favorable to change, it is rather a safety valve.

How is it that the British public has fallen so easily into the hands of large capitalistic interests: does the law of supply and demand entirely explain the absence of any independent intelligent free Press in Great Britain? It must be borne in mind that, besides the powerful check of the so-called Law of Libel, we have no tradition of a *presse d'opinion.* There never has been a widespread demand for newspapers which will keep the man in the street informed of public policy, and give expression to active criticism of public affairs such as that to which every American citizen is accustomed. There are no English parallels to the crop of partisan newspapers which sprang up after the Revolution of 1789 in France; nor to the long French tradition of high literary excellence and the independent signed articles by leading literary figures which have always been a feature of journalism in that country. And in large measure this is attributable to the formation of the English political character. There has been no revolution in England for more than two hundred years. During the eighteenth century the rich oligarchy which had captured the Government consolidated its power, and though the Industrial Revolution to some extent shifted control from the landed gentry to the wealthy manufacturers, with a simultaneous awakening of democratic feeling which has developed and broadened down to our own times, there has never been in England any widespread aspiration towards truly popular government, nor any consequent desire for information on matters of public policy. The average Englishman does not feel that to be his affair — he is not responsible and therefore not interested. The newspaper monopoly is not generally realized, there is no general dissatisfaction with the Press or any attempt to found other papers which might give scope for more diverse and critical views, as well as fuller and less carefully censored reports of current events — any more than there is general dissatisfaction with a popular brand of any commodity on sale. The unification of the control of the Press is not felt to be burdensome or stifling — indeed the British public is for the most part unaware that it exists and takes the Press as it is for granted.

But if it is dangerous that we should be fed upon illusion, if the British public is kept in ignorance of many facts which vitally concern it and not allowed to know the views of those who would inform it, yet there is nearly always something to be said on both sides. The English Press is indisputably popular as well as powerful, and on important matters it accords with something fundamental and essential in the English character; though it may in the long run have a dangerous influence, its immediate effect in conserving and cementing that unity which is so great an asset cannot be denied. It is easy to defend the reticences of the newspapers and the arguments for the Law of Libel as it now stands are obvious, for the danger to the stability of society which lies in free criticism and the uncensored reporting of events needs no emphasis. England's great strength undoubtedly lies in the homogeneous and united front which she presents to the whole world, enabling her to go through crises like the mutiny of the Navy a few years ago, the General Strike, and the abandonment of the Gold Standard, without anything even remotely resembling panic, or even widespread public uneasiness. On all such occasions the Press is unanimous in its efforts to minimize the dangers of the situation, to put the facts which it gives in their best colors, to suppress other facts either entirely or until such time as their significance be no longer paramount, and to gloss over the whole position by a mass of pseudo-patriotic self-praise: England Standing the Strain – Great Britain the Admiration of the Whole World – British Pluck and Self-Possession Pull Us Through – and so on. It would be blind folly and prejudice to deny that the method can be defended by results. The country has weathered the most dangerous crises and come better out of a bad situation than many expert observers at one moment thought possible, and to belittle the part which the Press has played in such recovery is to ignore the facts.

The character of the English Press as it is today – unofficially censored by its capitalist owners, who will allow nothing to appear which might interfere with their profits or tend to increase public discontent and unrest, thus undermining the foundations of that order of society of which they are the principal beneficiaries; and officially censored by the Law of Libel – has great advantages from the national point of view. It cements that unity which is the strength of the country, and in virtue of which dangers and disasters which might otherwise prove fatal can be met. I have quoted above the best, because the most recent, instance: the King, the nominal head of the State, ceased to hold public confidence and was obliged to abdicate. Yet so smoothly was the matter managed that the strain was hardly apparent. There was no dangerous public discussion beforehand, no adverse comment, no criticism, no suggestion that any other solution than that proposed by the authorities might be considered – and British prestige emerged from the ordeal surprisingly little damaged. It was as though an important guest at a public function went suddenly mad, but was so tactfully dealt with by the officials, so quietly and unobtrusively led away, and his sudden indisposition so eloquently explained to the assembled company by the master of ceremonies, that people had the impression that nothing very grave had happened. But had he been allowed to appear, a raving lunatic, to be dragged off shrieking and struggling, the whole tragic occurrence would have upset everybody, there might have been most unpleasant scenes – instead of that orderly dispersal, ninety-nine per cent of the company being under the impression that a minor misfortune had been got over with perfect tact.

Now that is all very well so far as it goes, and it goes a very long way – but not all the way. You cannot live upon illusion for ever, sooner or later reality breaks in. Sooner or later the facts will out. American readers find the English Press both ignorant and dull, and they are right. It is dull because it does not tell its readers the vital truth about national and international affairs when that truth is unfavorable; and it is ignorant because no effort is made to give a clear unbiassed version of opinion in other countries.

Therein lies the danger. For we in England do not know what is going on in the rest of the world, and especially do we not know what is going on in America, and what America thinks of us. We do not know because we are not told in our Press; and since Broadcasting in Great Britain is wholly official – a Government department with no rivals – there is no corrective to be hoped from in that quarter. Nor are we conscious of our lack of information. We are the best, the greatest, the richest – and we are always right – the newspapers tell us so every day, and patriotism bids us believe it. It is a dangerous illusion: and helps to widen the distance across the Atlantic.

"Jack of All Trades — Master of None"

WILLIAM EVERETT CRAM

THE TEXT of this essay, quoted over and over again during the centuries previous to this, both here and in Great Britain, may presumably have been the first announcement of the approach of our present mechanical age, and so far as experience and observation are to be relied upon, was never questioned or disputed. Those who so frequently quoted it, with an air of unquestioned authority, to the rising generation were themselves oftener than not skilled workmen in more than one line of constructive labor. Their object and motive evidently was to warn the beginner and apprentice under their instruction against the danger of going too far that way, but it is questionable whether their own minds could ever have grasped, or conceived as possible or practical, the opposite extreme to which the next three or four generations were destined to go in the way of specialized work, and even if they had, it would have been to them just another bit of evidence pointing along the line of never-ending progress in the perfection of things to be produced; pointing not to quantity, as we see it, but to quality.

Just compare the lasting power, the beauty of line and finish of factory-manufactured tools, furniture, etc., with that of similar products, hand-made from start to finish in the old workshops of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – shops which, in many instances, the workman himself planned and erected from foundation to ridge pole, of lumber which he had felled, hewn, and finished with broadaxe, hand saw, and plane. Hanging on a beam in my barn is a loafer rake, still in good working condition, made by a neighbor of my grandfather's generation who had adjoining his fine set of farm buildings his carpenter's shop and blacksmith's shop, where he himself did all the work. I have also several pitchforks with beautifully curved slender tines of hand-tempered steel, very likely forged, welded, and tempered by him on his own anvil. And this work was unquestionably done "for the love of the working" and the artist's pride in its completion, for he was a wealthy farmer and landowner whose estate had been handed down to him through generation after generation, and he could well have afforded to have passed his time in leisure if his taste had inclined that way. He chose, however, to spend his time, when not working in the shop, out in the field along with his hired men, morning and night doing his share of the chores, as did his neighbors.

In the lasting quality of material with which they worked, the carpenters of those days had the advantage of old-growth wood which had been a long time in arriving at maturity. Twenty years ago, more or less, while thinning out the standing timber in the woodlot, I cut a white oak that had grown up between the tall pines and hemlocks. It may have been thirty feet in height and four or five inches through at the stump and might easily have passed as a young tree until one noticed its rings of growth. I wish now that I had counted them. So close together were they from pith to bark, that sixty years might be a safe estimate of the age of that little tree with only a few small branches at its top. I made several axe helves of the lower sections of its trunk, and one of these is still in use. Another, with slender curving lines, not more than one half the diameter of the average axe helve, finally went out of use last winter; worn through by friction of blows on hardwood and pine. If this oak had sprung up in some sheltered opening where it could make rapid growth, an axe handle made from either heartwood or sapwood could hardly have been counted upon to do one winter's work.

The wood with which those old carpenters worked grew up among tall pines and hemlocks centuries old, which had their own growth under conditions similar to those of the little oak tree of which my axe helves were made, but with this difference, that the trees surrounding them in their youth were twice as large and twice as tall, with roots imbedded in forest mold of unknown depth and age, instead of reverted meadow land that two hundred years ago or more was mowed over by scythe and browsed by cattle, season after season.

Some of the hardwood floors in my house are fine-grained black birch, cut on this or neighboring farms, while the others are of coarser-grained birch which was brought here from the West, and which, I suspect, was cut from trees that had sprung up along the stream banks after the grass-grown prairies were sectioned off and plowed for crops. One of my townsmen, who visited a lumber firm in Boston to order the material for hardwood floors for his house, after looking over the supply on hand, said that he would take birch, but only the heartwood, and was told in reply that only the sapwood was sold as birch—the heartwood going as mahogany.

When the primaeval forest in this country became a thing of the past, and second-growth lumber was all that could be had, the quality of the workman's material degenerated accordingly. Of course, there were the mahogany, rosewood, etc., shipped from Africa and South America, yet these woods, though better than our second growth, are inferior to the old-growth wild cherry, curled maple, and bird's-eye maple of our Northern regions, because of their having made faster growth in those wet, semi-tropical climates. The native wild cherry, of which I can recall specimens which stood, here in our New England forests, eight feet in circumference at the stump and seventy or eighty feet in height, became extinct soon after the gypsy moth was brought over from Europe. Of all the rock maples that I have felled in my time, one only proved to be a curly maple, and I have not seen or heard of a bird's-eye maple cut within the last half century. Both the curly and the bird's-eye maple were evidently just varieties of the rock, or sugar, maple; the beautiful grain of their wood being due to side sprouts which started underneath the bark and failed to make their way out to the open air.

It would certainly be an interesting study to trace and measure with microscope the lines of growth in the wood of highboy, desk, clock frame, chairs, and bedstead, and other furniture of the days of the early settlers, down to the furniture of the present time. We are not, however, fully justified in placing all the blame on inferior material, for it is questionable whether our most skilled workmen now, even though given full leisure and long-hour days in which to perfect their art, in place of being speeded up to the very limit of endurance, and with the very finest old-growth wood to work, could ever succeed in reproducing the beautiful hand-carved furniture of our grandparents' day. The work of weaving, rug-making, and modelling in clay, which is springing up everywhere, is the most encouraging feature of handicraft now in sight and already offers us the hope of competing on an even level with the earlier work of this kind. Accomplished, as it is in most instances, by those who are not specialists themselves, but have other work they must do from day to day, it holds up before us one more bit of evidence that all the sayings of the past are not entirely to be relied upon.

On Teaching the Fine Arts

LANGDON WARNER

WE HAVE all admired the liberal spirit and keen perception of some person to whom no kind of honest art seems unsympathetic. Under such a man's guidance we too have enjoyed the little and the great, the strange as well as the familiar. The word that comes soonest to mind in describing his attitude will be the word cultivated. Historical facts he may not have at his finger tips, for the faculty we envy seems to have nothing to do with erudition.

It is undoubtedly the ambition of universities to produce such a flexible attitude in their graduates and to provide them, above all, with a method for judgement. Only during the last century or so has it been believed that the fine arts – those things made for the uses of the spirit rather than for the body – are the exclusive province of souls more sensitive than common. The idea that such members of the elect perceived and discriminated among the fine arts without training and without process of thought, and that the rest of us are born blind, is a new idea. But this idea has gained currency in the street and has begun to infect the universities.

If it is indeed true that only the elect can learn to discriminate, it is obvious that all the others should be omitted from the university courses in art. If there are no standards other than whim or contemporary fashion, let us by all means recognize the fact however odd and lamentable it may seem. A few courses might still be offered to the chosen spirits in which they could become better informed concerning the history of art and in the biographies of artists and the bibliographies of their subject. But it would be only honest to release the common herd from such learning and give them time for the other activities of which they are capable. Naturally after that we could never demand from our graduates in general any standards of literature or music or painting in later life. Those things, it would seem, are not part of every cultivated man's intellectual equipment. They must be relegated to the field of his emotions.

Happily such a supposition is absurd. No one will admit that the well-rounded life, lived to the fullest extent by a man trained in the university, could conceivably exclude enjoyment and use of the fine arts. Especially this is true if we admit the definition of art as "the things well made by man" and of the fine arts as "those things well made for the uses of the spirit rather than of the body". For the world is full of objects from shoes to sonnets in one or the other category, and to graduate young men impotent to select them wisely and to use them according to their worth, would of course be to admit that we had not prepared men for life itself.

It is becoming dreadfully obvious every day that our graduates frequently slip through our hands to emerge quite artless. Either they have not been stimulated to think about man-made objects, which they must constantly use for body and for spirit, or else they believe with the man in the street that vague intuition, or what they call good taste, will serve them instead of their intellects. This good taste they understand to mean an ability to recognize their own preferences, but no responsibility to convince themselves or anyone else that a given preference is reasonable. Even the trained few who have taken – happy phrase – our course in fine arts frequently seem to have no conscious criterion for judgement other than some arbitrary yardstick marked off in units of history or of other men's judgements. But the young men are keen enough and professors have facts enough. Hence we are forced to conclude either that judgement cannot be imparted or else that our method is wrong.

That the fault lies too often in the method is of course true. One has but to watch successful teachers in other departments – philosophers, mathematicians, and linguists – to see that they begin with fundamentals that shall be applicable through life for the solving of all similar problems. Working from the general to the particular, they provide *methods* by which a man may cultivate sound comprehension of his special discipline and arrive at a satisfactory conclusion concerning each special example. That facts are the material on which the several methods and tools are to be tried goes without saying. As examples are employed in algebra – but never for their own virtue – so in discovering the fundamentals of fine arts there is no better way to study. Our mistake has too often been that we are content to list our examples of art by their titles and their arbitrary classes, their centuries or their countries or their schools. We list but do not solve them.

There are people who will pull me up here to say that our object is, after all, beauty; and that beauty is an illusive thing spoiled by the touch of a solvent, by its very nature incapable of being solved; that to compare emotion with algebra is absurd; in short, such pedantry makes them sick. Without stopping to quarrel with the idea that the sense of beauty is in itself an emotion rather than a stimulus to an emotion, let me hasten to admit that if education fails to make a man more sensitive to the very sort of thing these people have in mind, it is not intellectual growth but a trade-school training in catching birds with salt.

But the universities have not lost sight of their goal when they teach history and science and mathematics. They would, I suppose, define their purpose to be the cultivation of a flexible power that may be used for solving unforeseen problems in those disciplines, a power that will increase and become more useful with practice. Thus their energies are bent on teaching a *method* for measuring quantities, which is mathematics; a *method* for judging thought, which is logic; a *method* for searching out the laws of nature, which is science; and a *method* for comprehending what foreign and ancient peoples have recorded, which is linguistics. Each of these disciplines has its own peculiar exercise which has been found best. But, with each, the aim must always be toward power and adaptability. Always it is an intellectual method, never a memorizing of phenomena. Facts are collected in the process because they are the material on which the pupil uses his new tools. It cannot be discovered, however, that the facts are in themselves tools. To accumulate them for their own sake, or in quantities that clutter up the work-bench, is but to distract the pupil's attention from being educated — from acquiring method.

But what better manner than our present one can be devised for young men to learn the use and selection of things that other men have made? Do we not already take pains that they shall become familiar with the works of the masters and thus establish standards by which other works of art may be judged?

If the assumption concealed in that question even remotely approached the facts we should be in better case. But there lies the catch. It is assumed that the students become familiar with the masters' works — the objects. But the fact is that we usually teach them the names of the masters, the dates of the masters, and the masters of the masters. We even go so far as to make them learn by rote the names of the churches and the museums where the objects are to be found. Most vicious of all, we teach them the tricks by which works of art may be distinguished from each other. Think of a mathematician busying himself with the difference between the Pons Asinorum and the Binominal Theorem!

But is there, after all, a method of examining the fine arts which can be used on any and every object? Is it fair to quote logic and arithmetic and philology as conceivably analogous? Is there, behind the fine arts, a basic principle that can be compared with the principles behind logic, numbers, or language structure? Can you label the essentials of man-made objects so that one can hope to examine and comprehend them? If that is possible, how could they apply alike to the use and choosing of claw-hammers, religious paintings, and cravats? If principles so general as to include these diverse things were found, could they possibly flavor and inform the things usually called art and the fine arts in particular? Will it not take the poetry out of our subject if we try to set up a practice like that of logic which teaches men to select and use ideas – although ideas are the stuff of poetry – or like rhetoric that teaches the use and selection of language – although language is of course poetry's medium?

Until a century or so ago it has been generally assumed in the West and in the Orient that there are indeed fundamentals of art which must be intellectually comprehended. Nor do these essentials differ in the useful and the fine arts. Strangely enough, to examine them has never meant the loss of beauty or of emotion, rather the reverse. Men of intellect have found themselves confirmed in their loves and even able to impart the same emotion to others with a kind of unshakable persuasion not always found in modern classes on art history.

Perhaps the most familiar definition of the essentials of art is to be found in the *Causes* of Aristotle. To examine examples of the fine arts in those terms is to experience beauty poignantly as well as to fit oneself, like a cultivated person, to use and choose the things made for both body and spirit in a man-made world. Whether or not the *Causes* interest one at first sight, it cannot be denied that they should look promising to the student of art, for they are at least present in everything that is made. It might be presumed that they will suggest a method for understanding which can be invariably applied, even though it may not take us the whole distance. One sees, too, that these Causes perform another very necessary purpose. The fact that they are essentials in the object *itself* immediately clarifies one's point of view in respect to his own emotional contribution to the object. The light by which we see has been, as it were, polarized and made selective. One may switch it off to resume the examination under the mixed and differently arranged rays from the burning gases in the sun, then back again to polarized light. The emotion stirred up by our sense of beauty may not in this way be precisely defined, but now we know something of where it lies, what elements of it are provided by ourselves and what by the object, which things interfere with its action, and something, at least, of those qualities in a thing that are invariably present when beauty is also there and absent when it is not.

The essentials (Causes) common to everything made are listed as the *Final Cause* or the Purpose, without which nothing can be made by man, let the purpose be ever so fleeting, mistaken, or hard to define; the two *Technical Causes*: Material, and Forces and Tools to shape material; the *Formal Cause*: or the essential image in the artist's brain of the thing he proposes to make, and in which is implicit the purpose, the material, and tools.

Omit any one of these Essentials and no thing can take shape at all. Slight one of them and the object is imperfect and proves unsatisfactory to the user or enjoyer. Obviously, the more I can know about each one of these Essentials in a given work of art the clearer my mind becomes concerning its virtues or defects. To appreciate their harmony is to recognize Perfection in the whole. Notice that familiarity with the artist's name and date, his teacher's name or that of the gallery where his picture hangs today, brings neither aesthetic nor intellectual satisfaction. For these facts are not essential to the object itself.

Straightforward as such an inquiry seems at first – indeed as it really is – the difficulties are infinitely greater than those presented to the historian of art who need merely memorize facts.

Pursued to its right conclusion we must learn, when we inquire into Purpose, the very yearnings of some man of alien creed, centuries dead, who, in the service of a god or a mistress or a whim that is strange to us, caused that picture to be painted. To judge it without a glimmer of its purpose is manifestly impossible.

Next, the Materials are seen to be, in their turn, as fundamental to the object – feathers for the pillow and steel for the bridge. That this is a matter for "pure aesthetics" as well as for commonplace utility is of course immediately apparent. For brittle marble has its own inherent qualities that restrict the shapes into which it may be cut, while a statue of bronze has quite other beauties of surface proper to poured metal hardened within a mold.

The essential forces and tools used to shape the stuff in which art is produced may be comprehended no less than Material and Purpose. The flexible brush of the Chinese calligrapher cannot compete, for all its more lovely magic, with the particular kind of prim excellence the linotype machine can scarcely avoid. Chisels biting off marble chips, and thumb or spatula shoving at the clay lump, leave different sorts of edges and planes – equally admirable and equally worth comprehending when the two statues are finished. What we call "style" is in this matter of technique, and a man may hope to grasp the higher values of style only after he has given thought to the craftsman's problems of medium and tools.

When at last the student inquires into the essential Image which the craftsman saw in his imagination and from which he patterned his work of art, new reason is given us to stick to examination of the thing itself rather than to a chance shape or to an accumulation of history. For the telling witness, if we can but obtain it, will be the maker's own conception of what his work of art must be, never our own haphazard emotions on the subject. It would be fairer to put off, yet a little longer, our own judgements. But even to guess at the artist's plan and vision one should find out something of the limits of his training, his surroundings, his personal aptitudes, and the possibilities during the age in which he lived. Here at last is found the sound reason and the necessity for the study of history in connection with the study of art and of aesthetics. For, to an informed mind, a mere date has power to summon up the whole cultural background rich with the most telling sort of information on the ideas and prejudices and mental images current in men's minds at that period. One undertakes an intellectual problem that will delight a cultivated man. For when the object of his study was made by holy persons, mystics, or geniuses, then religion, mysticism, and genius must be comprehended. If it was made at the village smithy in response to the demands of the neighbors, then the whole background of that village must be studied for the wants of simple people and the normal passing of their days.

To pursue such a method thoroughly in connection with a single work of art is to realize how purposes and materials and the imaginations of man have put their inevitable print on surface shapes. Fresh excellencies will be disclosed when we realize how admirably the craftsman contrived within his limitations. We shall now, and perhaps for the first time, be free from any temptation to make those comparisons and contrasts between objects of unlike Purpose and Material and Formal Image which delight the unthinking.

To suggest such a process of inquiry into the purpose and making and previous imagining of a work of art is to invite the question: "What then of beauty? Beauty is our preoccupation. Does the scholar lose sight of that goal in this rather arbitrary pursuit of Aristotle's Causes? Is this, after all, any improvement on the mode of study into which we are drifting? Beauty is not so easily cornered, it is impious or impossible to seize her."

But actually to go through the process of examining the essentials is quite another thing from talking about it. Then there is no doubt, then all that is "elusive and therefore charming" is lit up with a glow of understanding sympathy which is a warm light and akin, we know, to love. Elusive qualities still elude but we are more certain than ever that they exist.

To cut so deep as these fundamentals is in itself no easy task. If anyone professes to believe that even a preliminary treatment of the subject must needs be vague or that it would lack mental discipline, he is much mistaken. It would not indeed concern itself with training the memory nor certainly, on the other hand, would it indulge in the play of emotion. When the pupil discovers that the method is always the same and that the varying objects provide unending variety of problems, it is a delight to watch him questing and quartering the field to start new quarry on every side.

"But," you ask, "how should a beginner be inducted into this admirable attitude? He knows nothing of principles or of specific examples. Must he not be given some history at least?"

Let us take an example — any example that is presumably not so familiar to the beginner as to be encrusted with preconceived notions.

If it is an Egyptian god in granite — not a photograph of it but the real thing — we find that the material can be understood and the tools also. But in trying to get down to the artist's original concept, and the purpose of such an image, the teacher finds his opportunity from the very start to lop off all the distractions that obscure fundamentals. It will not take long to show that the Egyptian religion demanded such a symbol and that it was never conceived in the realm of lower realism to "function biologically". From the beginning the pupil will get a concept of the use of symbols other than his own and it will appear to him, possibly for the first time, that the religious instinct of all mankind is the same. When the true purpose of the statue and the artist's formal image have been dealt with, even at the expense of a reasonable time spent on gaining some comprehension of the strange religion and of the culture of the Nile Valley, the pupil will wish to come back to the subject of the material and to be given an idea of the limitations of Egyptian tools. Chipping and cutting will be distinguished from the surfaces where abrasive has been used and it will be shown how different tools insist on curves and edges that differ essentially. It will not be long before he is convinced, and of his own will, that flesh and blood are to be re-presented in formal manner, not copied in the hope to catch their own very different beauties. It may be a new concept to him to discover that the true artist has no ambition to deceive us into the admiration of flesh when he deals with admirable stone.

That stubborn and brittle granite limits the shape to bas-relief or to close-coupled figures in the round will now seem obvious. When, later, the student examines cast bronze sculpture he will be prepared for a freer play of gesture and, above all, for planes and modeled surfaces quite improper to stonecutting. The tools for granite will be made clear to him and the strait limitations they impose on the ultimate shape.

In parenthesis it should be mentioned that just here the student who has a creative instinct may possibly be encouraged instead of being quite frustrated by a university education.

At last this ancient figure stands, for the inquirer, squarely on its pedestal of Nile Valley culture, proper to its ritual purpose and cut in a shape that Egyptian granite and Egyptian tools would seem to make inevitable. Other examples of stone-carving will fall into place quite simply after their purposes are recognized as different from this first example, or the materials and tools are changed, or the artist's essential image is otherwise modified by his generation and his culture.

This first lesson — or perhaps one better chosen — will be the longest and the hardest of all to learn. But it need never be repeated. The process in considering each succeeding work of art will be the same, the details alone will be delightfully and eternally various. With each example that is new or strange some hitherto unrecognized barrier prejudicial to sound judgement will be overcome, but each time more easily. The pupil himself is found to enter heartily into the game and helps to discover his own blind spots. For one the religious instinct, Christian or Pagan, will seem merely silly and unscientific. Perhaps it will be found that this student has so great a horror of priestcraft that the very mention of religion invokes repugnance. It would be a stubborn or an uncommonly dull pupil who could not be shown the difference. Perhaps a disagreeable maiden aunt copied Rubens's "Descent from the Cross" in Berlin wool-work and the original masterpiece is quite buried for her nephew beneath that atrocity. Comprehension of fundamentals will soon clear away such false appearance. The pupil may not, cannot, master all religions and philosophies, but he will achieve a realizing sense of their prime importance in comprehending alien peoples and his own people whom he seeks to approach through their art. Immediately the art of his own times becomes a matter of absorbing interest. He will seek to know the true place of the craftsman (the artist) in modern American life. He will suddenly apprehend the difficulties that beset an artist whose patrons no longer possess instinctive standards for their demands, nor any understanding of materials and tools. He will be anxious to experiment with these mediums and tools and when he does so – if it is but to make his first pot or bookshelf – he will learn how essential is that preliminary clear image in the artist's mind without which no work of art can take shape, how necessary it is to know tools and medium and to keep in mind the purpose of what he makes.

Quite unable to read the whole of history and philosophy or to experience all varieties of religions or to practise even several crafts, he will yet be torn and tempted. This alert mood, once known, proves to be an unforgettable experience and, till his dying day, art – all that man has made – will possess such tang and rare flavor that he will not tire of observing and tasting its infinite variety.

No harassed college Dean who has the curriculum to manage will ever protest that the survey course in the fine arts that I describe is impracticable. He will realize that it does not teach the "history of art" but the very principles by which all art is comprehended. If then the student elects further courses in this subject, more factual information will be imparted in gradual addition to the modest skeleton he built up in his preliminary practice. Thus the young man is tempted, through knowledge, possibly to that wisdom which is its goal. Surely such discipline can never be thought outside the interests of culture, for it is demonstrably the natural way of learning.

One of the many unnatural ways of learning is to examine photographs and lantern slides in the endeavor to distinguish works of art by their names and to attribute them to masters, schools, and centuries. For in the first place these reproductions have no red corpuscles left in them. Mounted on cardboard or shown on a white screen in a dark room, they inevitably seem to lack purpose. The material from which the originals were made is now another material. Forces and tools used to shape that real stuff are now obscured and the original artist's image is dimmed or changed or quite obliterated.

And yet, lacking as we do great originals, the universities feel that they must insist on applying their detective methods to reproductions. The result is that a lantern slide of the north portal of Chartres Cathedral is soon found by the ingenious undergraduate to be easily distinguished, at examination time, from that on the south by the presence of a lady holding a parasol.

Pathetic and ridiculous as this method of memorizing non-essentials has become, and evil though the misapplied use of reproductions unquestionably is, there is no need to discard entirely our expensive paraphernalia for teaching. Still less need we despair of teaching the fine arts at all without great originals. The best understanding of the entire method can be instilled at the beginning by the study of good examples of the obviously useful arts. They, more often than not, combine to serve both body and spirit and will bridge the gap between the fine and applied arts. If the college has an ethnological collection it will prove a treasure house of the more readily comprehended arts of unsophisticated peoples. Their pottery and textiles, their stone and wood sculpture, their carved paddles and war-clubs prove more fit for the study of beginners than deceptively accomplished paintings by European masters.

It is a temptation to carry this matter further and to outline the preliminary course in Fine Arts that I consider would be ideal. But that would be to defeat my own object. No teacher, once persuaded of its gentle efficacy, would be at a loss for a sound procedure when he has consented to chuck out such impedimenta as our undue emphasis on chronology, a host of foreign names, the arbitrary division of schools by means of drapery, palettes, and the changing fashion of subjects. He will see at once where the finger points and will draw on the art of all mankind to illustrate the various impulses of art and its profound essentials. He will soon discover that certain periods and schools – like the European Renaissance, for instance – should perhaps be studied only at the end of such a course, because in such times the purposes of art are sometimes hidden by emphasis on superficial distractions – art for art's sake instead of art for the sake of the Thing that is made. He will perhaps save Greek and Roman examples till he is certain that his pupils can distinguish the peril that lies in mistaking the beauties derived from copying flesh and blood for the direct beauties of marble – the carver's only concern.

A young mind thus directed to the subject of fine arts, during even the single course which the average undergraduate can afford, will indeed lack information on the great *corpus* of artistic changes through all ages and in all countries. But on each new phase presented in after life it will bring to bear an unclouded vision, not to be dismayed by preconceptions of loveliness or made inflexible by loyalties to calf loves. Without shifting his allegiance, a man of twentieth-century training should find cause for sincere admiration in the Fiji idol of horrid nose and shell eye or in the noble baroque carving of an equally strict (and temporarily unpopular) European convention. For in each case the carver has contrived his planes of whittled wood to such purpose that knife-stroke and grain seem vying with one another to help and not to hinder. Always the interest of a mind trained in the university toward comprehending the essentials of art will be finding fresh zest in each new phase. Secure in his method for comprehending, he will find that surface phenomena, which distract and puzzle another, will be no barrier to him. For his power is not measured by the accumulation of his erudition but by the cultivation of his insight.

There is, of course, no single road to teaching the fine arts. My concern is rather to re-define the ancient goal of the universities than to lay down the road to it.

REVIEWS

A Philosophy of Rhetoric*

THE *PHILOSOPHY of Rhetoric* comprises the Mary Flexner Lectures on the Humanities delivered by I. A. Richards at Bryn Mawr College during February and March of 1936. The choice of rhetoric as a subject for a series of lectures on the humanities would seem a happy one, since in the older curriculum of humane education rhetoric took an important place as the art by which effective utterance could be given to the clarity of thought which it was the purpose of that education to develop. At present, as Mr. Richards says, an enfeebling academic dust lies on the subject, and "it is the weariest and least profitable part of the waste that the unfortunate travel through in Freshman English". This sad state is, of course, one into which any subject falls in the hands of unimaginative teachers; but the condition of our thought also accounts for the disrepute in which rhetoric is held: when thinking is confused, and few believe there are any very definite laws to govern it, an art which proposes to lay down rules for the clear expression of thought will necessarily seem a superficial and arbitrary one. And to the causes of the decline of rhetoric must be added the notion that the

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*THE PHILOSOPHY OF RHETORIC *by I. A. Richards* (OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. 138 pp. $1.75).

best of prose and verse issues from depths beyond the probing of mere reason.

Mr. Richards, as his previous attempts to establish what might be called a science of literary criticism attest, does not hold this last view, and his studies in the "meaning of meaning" indicate that he is aware of some basic confusion in present-day thought. A revived rhetoric, he holds, could do much to straighten out our confusion by removing the difficulties of comunication and enabling us to restate in plainer terms the problems that lie at the center of our thought. "Rhetoric," he says, ". . . should be a study of misunderstanding and its remedies." For the future of this study he entertains high hopes indeed ("Of course, inevitably *at present*, we have no measure with which to calculate the extent and degree of our hourly losses in communication") but for the time being, as he sees it, we can do no more than begin the foundation of that happy future. Here, at the outset, one feels prompted to ask if misunderstanding is not basically a matter of ideas rather than words, which are the material of rhetoric, but Mr. Richards anticipates the question with some lines from Berkeley, in which the Bishop requests that "whoever shall think it worth his while to understand" shall "laying aside the words as much as possible, consider the bare notions themselves". But, maintains Mr. Richards, "the trouble is that we *can* only 'collect the whole sum and tenor of the discourse' from the words, we cannot 'lay aside the words' ". An idea "apart from its dress is not identifiable".

The fundamental concern of rhetoric, then, is "how words work in discourse", and throughout the six lectures Mr. Richards addresses himself to the questions of what, if any, meaning words have and of the manner in which this meaning is established. "Stability in a word's meaning is not something to be assumed," he says, "but always something to be explained." This is a statement true enough in itself, for the assumption that a word is being used in a constant sense, when in reality it has been given some new shift of meaning, is a great breeder of fallacious doctrines; but the implications Mr. Richards draws from the statement are open to some questioning. And these implications are his Philosophy of Rhetoric. His philosophy – "the way I propose to treat meanings", as he says – "has its analogues with Mr. Whitehead's treatment of things", and the reader is thus warned that he will encounter those peculiarly difficult conceptions which mark the philosophy of organism. Nor does the fact that Mr. Richards has "here kept the written word very close to the spoken" make it easier to follow the logical progression of his thought.

To search out the analogue Mr. Richards mentions may ease some of the difficulties of following his argument. The philosophy of organism is characterized by a quality scarcely conceived of as "organic" in popular thought and expression, where an organism is a complex of parts capable of unified action in the interest of the whole. Such relatively independent organisms, however, disappear in the ultimate monism of Mr. Whitehead's philosophy (and that of Messrs. Alexander and Lloyd Morgan), leaving but one vast universal organism – a sort of Absolute consisting of constantly fluctuating parts whose natures are to be understood only in terms of the whole. The Absolute, embracing and determining the whole of experience, is yet outside of man's experience and provides him no aid in understanding the limited experience he does have; each thing that comes within the range of his knowledge is wholly unique, not because it is individuated by its substance, but because it is a complex of events in a universe constantly in flux. Since man himself is such a complex, he also contributes to the nature of the thing he experiences: he may not, as in the older philosophical idealism, create what he sees, but he is a creation not ultimately separable from what he sees. The philosophy of organism is Berkeley tinctured with evolutionism, and it does not escape idealism's solipsistic dilemma by positing a constantly changing "ground" in which thought-events take place. The relevance of this *Weltansicht* to Mr. Richards's inquiry into rhetoric becomes clear with his definition of meaning.

The grave fault of classical rhetoric, in Mr. Richards's opinion, is the "Proper Meaning Superstition" – by which he means the "belief . . . that a word has a meaning of its own (ideally, only one) independent of and controlling its use and the purpose for which it should be uttered". No research, he says, into linguistics or psychology will support such a claim, and the truth is that a word's meaning can only be determined by the context in which it is used. The similarities between Mr. Richards's view of meaning and the "organic" view of our experience and what produces it are here at their most obvious: both views emphasize a fluid instability and both thereby set great if not insuperable difficulties in the way of making any lasting distinctions. Everything in experience undoubtedly is modified by the time and place in which it is given, and words likewise render the fullness of their meaning only in their context; but if, as we are told, there is no divorcing meaning from context, and, since a context is, so to speak, but a particular complex, meaning is in each case unique, and it is hard to see what universal application can be made of it. Yet Mr. Richards is in quest of something unchanging in meaning, for he quotes Hobbes to the effect that "the end or scope of philosophy is, that we may make use to our benefit of effects formerly seen", and such use requires a certainty of recurrence. He even seems to say that this Hobbesian utility is the only valid test of theoretical inquiry – as indeed it must be if one denies to the mind the ability to attain permanent truth, for when a man cannot depend upon the workings of his mind's intrinsic principles to bring him into contact with reality, he will be forced by his daily needs to turn to the pragmatic test of truth and assume a thing to be true when the action that postulates it succeeds.

"All thinking," says Mr. Richards, "from the highest to the lowest – whatever else it may be – is sorting." This appears to follow naturally from his empirical and utilitarian view of truth: with usefulness as its chief criterion, the mind cannot be better occupied than in rearranging in readily available order its observations of workable effects in nature. And in turn it follows that "meaning is *delegated efficacy*" and the virtue of words "is to be substitutes exerting the powers of what is not there. They do this as other signs do it, though in more complex fashions, through their contexts." The word *context*, he warns us, he uses in a "rather special and technical sense", which he defines thus:

> Most generally [context] is a name for a whole cluster of events that recur together – including the required conditions as well as whatever we may pick out as cause and effect. But the modes of causal recurrence on which meaning depends are peculiar through that delegated efficacy I have been talking about. In these contexts one item – typically a word – takes over the duties of parts which can then be omitted from the recurrence. There is thus an abridgement of the context only shown in the behavior of living things. . . . When this abridgement happens, what the sign or word – the item with these delegated powers – means is the missing part of the context.

Even within the context of the whole book, the above attempt at a definition is not much more comprehensible than it must appear here, but the applications made of it by Mr. Richards seem to establish its sense as follows. Since utility is the end of knowledge, our observations of cause and effect are determined by the various forms of utility; that is, we ascribe cause and effect in any happening to those factors which come under the purview of the particular department of knowledge serving the point of interest: a lawyer might ascribe a death to a blow dealt with muderous intent, but a physician would ascribe it to a weak heart. This special form of knowledge is the context of our meaning; our use of a word is determined by the end which this knowledge serves; the word's meaning is conditioned by, and is the result of, factors peculiar to a particular purpose. If this meant only that various arts and sciences use the same word in different ways — just as the word *essence* means one thing in the perfume industry and another in the philosophy of Aquinas — it would be plain enough, however doubtfully and abstrusely arrived at; but Mr. Richards intends more.

Meaning, if I follow the implications of his theory correctly, ultimately depends on motive, or what is wished — or the mind that happens to formulate the meaning. Meaning, therefore, is not the mind's absorption of exterior fact (fact understood as what exists independent of the mind); but it is what the mind projects into the outer world, and since the world is only apprehensible in so far as it has meaning, it is after all a product of the mind. At the same time, there is no *necessary* form for this projection; the mind may operate according to any number of conventions, all apparently equally valid, so that a total picture of reality, or mind-reality, would have to be got through all the conventions, held simultaneously. But as this would result in madness, a single convention must be adhered to for convenience's sake, and meaning, once more, is a matter of utility. We have here a technique which will reconcile, to its own satisfaction, the most extravagant developments of, say, German idealism with the crudest behaviorism. It is significant that Mr. Richards is an admirer of Coleridge, who was immersed in the first, and of Bentham, who stands as a lineal ancestor of our contemporary Pavolvians and Watsonians.

"Pre-eminently what the theorem [of contexts] would discourage is our habit of behaving as though, if a passage means one thing it cannot at the same time mean another and incompatible thing." Having set forth in his first two lectures the metaphysical suppositions which allow him to deny the principle of contradiction in statements like the foregoing, Mr. Richards proceeds in his next four lectures to use these assumptions as the basis of his attack on the "Proper Usage Superstition". A detailed account of his attack would require a comparison of it with his books on Bentham and Coleridge, to which it is closely related. Were it not for Proper Usage, one might call his approach admirable in its sophistical ingenuity. In urging that all depends upon context, he naturally turns to poetry, where the heavy connotative value of words can be made to lend weight to his theory that there are no constant meanings. What he overlooks is the fact that there can be no connotation without denotation: the latter is the fixed referent that summons up the former. He also attempts to disprove the theory of the onomatopoeic origin of certain words, since it lends support to the belief in a constant meaning by insisting that words, out of their very sound, have meaning independent of their context. His task of refutation is made easy because he states the theory as holding that certain words "in virtue of their sound must mean certain things". The catch is the word *must*: the theory merely states that an action or thing suggested a certain word, the sound of which in turns suggests the action or thing. Mr. Richards's use of *must* implies an impossible kind of causal connection which makes his own arguments seem by contrast positively Aristotelian. Aristotle, however, comes in for some severe handling when Mr. Richards considers metaphor. Metaphor, he says, is no gift of the few, but the primary vehicle of thought and language. The worth of metaphor to his theory is considerable, since metaphors by their nature deal in at least a double set of meanings and represent a compression of thought which, in exposition, can be extended in a great variety of directions. Yet he ignores the very evident truth that poetic metaphors achieve their effect by a species of shock: the force of their imaginative contrasts, in which lies their meaning, would not appear if words did not refer to constant things whose new juxtapositions startle the mind to fresh awareness. It should in fairness be said that many of his passing insights into the way metaphors work serve to illuminate the general subject of language.

"Words," says Mr. Richards in summing up, "are the meeting points at which regions of experience which can never combine in sensation or intuition come together."

> They are the occasion and means of that growth which is the mind's endless endeavor to order itself. That is why we have language. It is no mere signalling system. It is the instrument of all our distinctively human development, of everything in which we go beyond the other animals . . . It is the word which brings in the meaning which the image and its original perception lack.

The philosophical idealism and the empiricism which play such large parts in Mr. Richards's thought are both systems which achieve a specious unity by ruling out a whole province of man's experience. Mr. Richards, as we have seen, reconciles them in a unity of his own; but, uniting extremes, he leaves out the entire middle region, in which lies human truth. Pursued by what Dr. More called the Demon of the Absolute, he equates mind with what it beholds, expression with what is expressed, and, as the above quotation indicates, in the end makes expression one with experience: the circle is closed and nothing is left out except proof that we are not wandering in the shadowy Limbo from which Mr. Richards in the beginning hoped to save rhetoric. Determined to start from "reality", to begin only with the verifiable facts and to draw from them only such inferences as can be checked against other facts, Mr. Richards has been tricked by reality, which dissolves before he touches it, and he is forced to conclude "that the mind and all its doings are fictions", "that matter and its adventures, and all the derivative objects of contemplation, are fictions too, of varied rank because of varied service".

This conclusion seems the inevitable one for those who insist on the "organic" nature of things out of a dislike for traditional reason – which they look on as a death-dealing process that resolves things into their components instead of presenting them in the full immediacy of unreflective experience, or "Life". But for one to protest against reason on these grounds is to kick against his pricks. That a construction is "logical" as opposed to "real" in its order in the mind does not make of it a "fiction", for, owing to our mental limitations, there are great ranges of the real we can apprehend only through the logical. The failure to recognize and accept these limitations is a vice which in the end leaves its victims less than human, and that by their own reckoning.

GEOFFREY STONE

The Infant Samuel*

FEW literary men are destined to have such an effect on the generations which immediately follow them as Samuel Butler has had. Writer after writer has arisen and flourished in his debt. George Bernard Shaw was and is his outspoken disciple. Were the Somerset Maugham who wrote *Of Human Bondage* and the Arnold Bennett who wrote *Clayhanger* aware of their progenitor? Undoubtedly they were; the line of descent is too unmistakable, and they, as writers, too fully conscious of the forces which shaped them, as they have often shown. Wells, too, fell under the stark enchantment; his "Utopias" were all Erewhons, and but distantly related to the ideal country of Sir Thomas Moore.

If Butler can count his thousands, these later followers have felled their ten thousands; and a countless horde of other writers have stemmed from them. It is safe to say that there is hardly an English-speaking person alive today whose life is not in some way altered – and in most cases warped – by the fact that Samuel Butler lived, despised his family, nursed his childish pain throughout his life, and wrote *The Way of All Flesh.*

His novel was by no means his only contribution to his times, yet, since of all the modes of contemporary writing fiction finds the widest audience, it is Butler's novel which has most influenced the last thirty years. The rare common sense which he sometimes showed, notably in his differences with Charles Dar-

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*THE EARNEST ATHEIST, A STUDY OF SAMUEL BUTLER *by Malcolm Muggeridge* (PUTNAM. 266 pp. $2.75).

win, earns him the gratitude of many who would very gladly dispense with the consequences of his novel. His *Notebooks* are a mixed blessing; his theory of the authorship of the *Odyssey* a literary curiosity and little more; his contribution to the controversy over Shakespeare's Sonnets the oddest mixture of flat unimaginativeness and penetrating intuition. But for one reader of these treatises there have been a hundred readers of the novel. It is as the author of ***The Way of All Flesh*** that he is important, and it is mainly as the novelist that he is treated in Malcolm Muggeridge's new study, which has sent the newspaper reviewers off on a feverish hunt for suitable secular equivalents of such words as "sacrilege" and "blasphemy".

For Mr. Muggeridge is frankly no longer held by the contemporary piety to Butler. He has "reacted against" it, indeed, so completely that more than once he throws out Butler's good with Butler's bad. This might as well be said at once, since, flaws and all, his study is a valuable antidote to the Butler-worship of the day.

The author is the same Mr. Muggeridge who went to Russia as a sympathizer with the Communist régime and came away to write *Winter in Moscow*, one of the few books we have had in which the author was not, if not outright licking Soviet boots, quick to give them a surreptitious wiping off with the sleeve of his writing arm. He went to Russia expecting crudity, incompleteness, and even some complacency, but expecting equally to be able to discount them as evidences of youthful vitality. He found "the Russian experiment" tragic, ludicrous, contemptible, and threatening, and he wrote his book to say so. So far from standing him in good stead, this outspokenness is now brought forward as evidence that Mr. Muggeridge, for reasons of his own, is interested solely in uncovering the clay feet of idols. A generation of "debunking" writers, and of critics who have thriven on approving these writers' efforts, is now in the slightly silly position of protesting at seeing the technique they perfected to undermine stability and conservatism turned against their own subversive activities.

Mr. Muggeridge goes after his "hero" hammer and tongs. He has not the suavity of a Lytton Strachey, nor the staying powers of a W. E. Woodward; he lets his contempt, here as in the earlier book, get somewhat out of hand, and he writes too rapidly and repetitiously to get the full effect from his thesis, which is that Butler was a whining, complaining, self-pitying, hypocritical, spinsterish old fuss-budget, who trimmed his sails to the financial breeze blowing from his father's rectory, and took very good care not to publish the meanest of the attacks upon his father and his childhood until his inheritance was safely in his hands. Mr. Muggeridge has no difficulty in proving his point. Few men of letters have left such obligingly full and revealing documents as Butler. They were there for all to see long before this book was written.

The babyish wish-fulfillment of Ernest's return home to impress his parents was there in print for two generations. The sentimental *schwärmerei* of Butler and Festing Jones about their "dear little men" – Hans and Remi Raensch, in their twenties! – has been an open secret these thirty years, as has Butler's inhuman cruelty to and exploitation of Miss Savage, and his gullible submission to Pauli. This is not to say that Mr. Muggeridge has turned up no new material; from "Alfred", who was for years Butler's factotum, he gathered some touches which are illuminating and which give rise to almost painful laughter. But for the most part, Butler had written his own portrait again and again, and the wonder is of what materials his adorers built up their idol, and how they could so fiercely have defended it these many years.

The explanation is perhaps that Butler was so ideally, in many ways, the expression of his time that his very imbecilities were looked upon as virtues. This is not Mr. Muggeridge's explanation; he believes, rather, that Butler was a sport on his species. Yet it should be obvious that Butler in his life and work exemplified the pervading tone of his Rousseau-saturated period. In especial the overestimation of childhood and the overvaluation of the normal pain of adjusting to an adult world have dominated our literature and our education. It is since *Emile* that we have had our "century of the child", our Shaws, our Ellen Keys and Freuds and Deweys, our Bashkirtseffs and our Barbellions. Butler is only one of the first and most outspoken to use the English language to pander to the self-pity which masquerades as an earnest desire to spare children all pain, to teach them to express themselves, and to erect their own standards.

If Mr. Muggeridge had seen this he could have made a stronger book, and one which might, perhaps, have counteracted the call to prophecy of this Infant Samuel more effectively than *The Earnest Atheist* is likely to do. Tentatively – since two books, for both of which we have cause to be grateful, do not give enough grounds for a final judgement – it appears that

Mr. Muggeridge is in the position of knowing what he does *not* like but of having no established convictions behind him as he writes. From his occasional reviews and articles in the English press, it seems that he is as much in the toils of liberalism as ever. He has forsworn two of the end results of romanticism; perhaps he will cut off the other tentacles one by one. Out of gratitude to a writer whose two books, imperfect as they are, are yet encouragingly free from contemporary cant, we might pray that Mr. Muggeridge may come to see his real opponent clearly enough to plunge his sword in its heart.

MIRIAM COLGATE

A Small-Town Dante*

ALTHOUGH a few timid souls may still deny it, man has now reached a stage in his civilization – says Harry Elmer Barnes not unexpectedly in his introduction to this book – where he might easily enter into a Utopian existence. "We can produce all we need for creature comforts and physical protection in a few hours' work each week," Mr. Barnes announces – not stopping to explain to the timid soul what this might mean in terms of economic freedom. "We have banished fear of the supernatural world and its powers" – which means that the timid soul's religion is bankrupt at last. "We know how to handle the delicate and difficult problems of amour and domesticity" – which to the observant timid soul may seem a little in advance of the facts. "We have come to understand the nature of war, its barbarities and stupidities, and the means of preventing it" – which particularly for timid souls is startling news indeed. And into this new world, which is hesitating just around the corner from Utopia, now comes Professor James Harvey Robinson, author of *The Mind in the Making*, with a new book which will tell us why we have tarried on the way. He comes, says Mr. Barnes, like a new Dante – a comparison that is "not at all pretentious for the student of human culture"; for where Dante himself was "far and away the ablest systematizer and popularizer of mediaeval supernaturalism", James Harvey Robinson can be fairly compared with him as "the most competent, engaging, and persuasive expositor of the knowledge which has grown out of our age of science, secularism, agnosticism, and intellectual emancipation".

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* THE HUMAN COMEDY *by James Harvey Robinson* (HARPERS. 412 pp. $3.00).

What then has the new Dante to say to us? Alas, if it all has a somewhat familiar ring, let timid souls not tremble the less. In the first place, it seems, religion in general and Christianity in particular are more than a little ridiculous. Attempts to define religion are "pathetic"; Bradstreet, wise man, "does not reckon with religion in establishing one's credit"; the leaders of the various churches have "very generally . . . supported slavery" (tremble, you, too, Bishop Wilberforce!); mediaeval monasticism was largely a matter of sex; it is quite likely that mystic experiences are really only "pathological"; many reports of sanctity will be shocking and repelling to "one unfamiliar with the literature"; "it has been demonstrated that religious dogma [or shall we simply say religion?] can be neglected in matters of public concern and reduced to a question of private taste and preference".

So much for what, lacking a less "pathetic" term, we can only call religion. What of metaphysics, logic, "the comforting conception of the Absolute in which logical and world-weary souls have sought refuge from the times of Plotinus to those of Josiah Royce"? All this sort of thing, it seems, was "good enough for Anselm and Descartes", but not for us; we are happily emancipated from the "fantasy of the metaphysician", busying itself with "conceptions, abstractions, distinctions, hypotheses, postulates", which give him "the delightful emotion of pursuing Truth". All this arose from outmoded notions of the mind: a new theory of thinking may "make it possible to dispense . . . with the 'mysterious something' which has hitherto been 'mind' or 'reason' ". But since "mind" is after all the word we are used to, Professor Robinson adds that "never was mind in general so good as it now is; it has been vastly improved during the past fifty years". As for the books in which mind is enshrined, Professor Robinson "ventures to guess that books which have appeared in the past half-century [including, we presume, a few that are post-Josiah Royce] cast more light on man, his nature, history, and possibilities than can be found in all the revered works of the past". O worthless libraries! O wasted hours! In short, only "archaic and oppressive social institutions" hold man back from entrance into "the economy of abundance which is veritably just around the corner"; Watsonian behaviorism is still alive and kicking; and Mr. H. G. Wells is in his heaven.

So much for the destructive side of this extraordinary book. What has Professor Robinson to offer, now that man has "got civilization well under way", toward a solution of the problems which have preoccupied our thinkers since thought began? What, for instance, of the nature of mind? Professor Robinson seems to take what might be called the gravitational view: "When our distant forbears," he writes, "began to walk firmly on their hind legs, and thus found their hands free, then it was that their good, big brains began to undergo those changes that make them so superior to those of the highest apes." What of morals? The answer seems to be that "morality is gradually being shifted on to a new and, what seems to me a firmer, basis, namely that it *pays*, in this world and the next, if such there be" – a shift which will presumably make it possible to solve moral problems by the statistical method beloved of Mr. Bradstreet. What of the economic problem? Professor Robinson's answer is that "it may be there is some vital truth in the idea of the Technocrats that we must turn the control of economic life over to experts as an engineering problem . . . a transition from production for profits to production for service". And what of the all-important political problem? Professor Robinson distrusts equalitarian democracy on strictly scientific grounds; he has gone, of all places, to "differential psychology", which he discovers to have proved that "there is no such thing as even approximate mental equality among men"; in fact, he adds in his friendly, tolerant way, "the majority of men range from mediocrity to imbecility". No, Professor Robinson's contribution to human freedom will be along another than the democratic line: what he is after – but only as a starter –

is "weighted suffrage, based upon results of intelligence tests given the whole population". This, then, is Emancipation; this is the modern Dante's Utopia.

It is not a pleasure to criticize a book of this kind; for there is no question here of Professor Robinson's sincerity and lifelong devotion to his work. It was doing him no service to publish after his death these elaborate notes on his philosophy of life; but what is most astonishing of all is that such a book, reeking of bankrupt rationalism and an outmoded naturalism, provincial in the extreme, can be touted into best-sellerdom today. None other than Charles R. Beard praises it as a "book that is likely to stand the ravages of time". If it does so, it can only be as a curious compendium of most of the ideas which have brought our modern world into the state of frustration and inhumanity from which we are just beginning to emerge.

EDWARD MC KAY

Progress and Passivity *

THIS book is the concluding volume of Gerald Heard's trilogy. For several years he has been preoccupied with the problem of contemporary civilization. That problem, as he sees it, is that, in attempting to establish the rule of law through the use of violence, we have destroyed law, and that in striving to protect the light of reason with the extinguisher of force, we find ourselves plunged back into the realm of chaos; we want peace and justice but seem able to attain those values only by acts which destroy them.

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* THE SOURCE OF CIVILIZATION *by Gerald Heard* (HARPERS. 431 pp. $3.50).

The riddle is to find some force, other than unlimited violence, which can implement the ideals by which man desires to live. Wherefore Gerald Heard endeavors to formulate for his contemporaries what the philosophers call the sufficient cause of social cohesion.

Some years ago he started out with *The Ascent Of Man*, in which he analyzed the speculation that the cohesive force in social life began as an instinct in animal group-consciousness and developed into the social quality of self-forgetful loyalty. In the course of his inquiry he found that such a speculation was untenable. He then sought the answer elsewhere, and in *The Social Substance Of Religion* he seems to have felt at the begining of his study that the great achievement of religion was to enable the individual to maintain his symbiotic relationship with his fellow men. Here again the analysis gave negative results. In the preface to this third book he expressly asserts "nor can we look to traditional religion to save our civilization now it has reached its gravest crisis". He turns to psychology to seek the source of unifying power.

It is in social psychology, rather than in the psychology of the individual, that Mr. Heard looks for some process whereby men gave themselves a power of making contact with what he calls their greater and social self. The desiderated power, "although belonging to what the individual consciousness calls the subconscious, must nevertheless be reached by an effort of consciousness, by a deliberate technique". He admits that many men undoubtedly found some such process *in* religion but not necessarily *by* religion, and he wonders whether "in a complete psychology they would not find both the cosmology and theology they needed". At any rate, the process by which such a technique of making social contact was established would be, he thinks, the most essential history ever written, and in this book he proceeds to make the first sketch of that assumed process. Here, then, is the thesis: "There are, it seems, in our records now sufficient statements of practices wherein we may recognize the gradual discovery and ever clearer definition of a technique whereby the individual can make himself race-conscious, re-mend the fissure in his own psyche, and see himself and his community, it and Life, and Life and the universe as one."

At the outset he expressly rejects every notion of a social contract, his argument being that, just as the individual man almost imperceptibly becomes conscious that he is growing up in a family, so it seems certain that man, as gradually and unawarely, awoke to the fact that he was living in a society with his fellows. Whence our author proceeds to pillory Hobbes. He forgets, however, that in making his appeal to history and in following the general shift of modern thought from principles to persons, he is adopting the very method of argumentation that led Hobbes astray. Hobbes turned from philosophy to history. Instead of asking how men ought to behave if they would bring their natural potentialities to as rich a fruition as possible, he asked how they actually had behaved. Hobbes learned from history, for example, that civilized men had ever manifested a proneness to set up kings; from this he concluded that monarchy is the most natural form of government. Against this, however, he learned from the history of Rome that sovereignty was somehow derived from the people. With these two historical elements in hand he proceeded to formulate a political philosophy which would include both the monarchical and the democratic forms of government. Hobbes believed that history is philosophy-teaching by example. Gerald Heard writes that "all history is only the shadow cast by the growing and defining spirit of man".

Our author is fully aware of the fact that, chiefly because of the falsity of the Hobbesian theory, "civilization is at present pursuing a mistaken and fatal course and [that] to contemporary people of good-will it seems that they are born fatal heirs to a growing sequence of disaster". What he seems to fail to see is that an exclusive appeal to the historical behaviorism of social groups exposes the thinker to the dangers of fallacy in an inquiry of this kind. It was not for nothing that Aristotle wrote on the first page of his *Metaphysics* the truth that the individual alone is substantial reality and alone has real value in any approach to the problem of man-and-the-universe.

Mr. Heard, however, feels that he can achieve some solution of the contemporary problem of our impending disaster by the method invented by Hobbes, the method of arguing solely from what history shows man to have done rather than from what the classical philosophy shows man to be. He begins by challenging the pretensions of those who hold that natural selection has been the cause of man's evolution. His biological theory is that, not natural selection, but a growing sensitiveness, a progressively developing awareness, a constantly widening focus of new experiences is the secret to the evolution of Life. Although he does not say it in so many words, his theory seems to be that along the line of evolutionary development it is the awareness of the meek rather than the violence of the strong that ultimately possesses the earth. He tells us that the faultless machine, the finished fish, amphibian, or reptile, invariably yields before the "faulty, fertile vitality" of the unspecialized. And then we have this lyrical pronouncement: "The perfectly efficient is the perfectly finished. All finish is fatal to full life."

Having dealt with natural history, he goes on to what he calls pre-history and proto-history in the story of man's ascent. The lesson of pre-history is that only the unspecialized type of man survived. The intermediate men failed. "What is certain is that they all perished and the creature that never quite fitted, that never felt wholly natural or comfortable, went on to complete supremacy." In the uncharted realm of proto-history he finds three great cultures, that of the Nile, of the Euphrates, and of the Indus. Of these three, the really successful one was that of the Indus, he believes, and his explanation of that relative survival seems to be based upon the archaeological evidence that in the lowest levels of that culture "though tools are abundant, weapons are still to seek". In other words, the non-violent alone survive.

Now, the Nilotic and the Mesopotamian cultures "developed the fatal specialization of war which today drives us to the brink". But the Indus culture apparently had the good fortune, by reason presumably of its non-violent acceptance of Life, to invent a psychological technique which Mr. Heard believes is surviving at the present day. That technique is the Yoga philosophy, he tells us; it is a device which "solves the problem of the self-divided individual, that of the individual and society, and that of consciousness and Life and indeed the universe, through the single solution of making the individual learn how to achieve knowledge of his extra-individuality". The latter half of Mr. Heard's book is an exposition of his theories as to the need of some such psychological device in our effort to save our civilization. Whatever one may think of the various stages of the somewhat turgid argument, no one can question the earnestness of an author who writes: "A psychological revolution is our only escape from material destruction and mental derangement. There is no other way."

In his broad sweep of the historical field and especially in his attention to the social chaos to which we seem to be driven, our author has written a book that is certainly evocative of thought. But the book's argument is unbalanced by reason of the author's undue preoccupation with the threatened collapse of our economic and political life. Economic forms, political techniques, social structures, even artistic cultures may disappear or be transformed. Moral and philosophical temperaments, on the contrary, endure; they belong to the deeper reaches of the human spirit. And we are not yet without hope that the philosophical equipment which the West inherited from the Greeks and which has sustained our civilization for two thousand years will prove amply sufficient for our psychological needs on the day when the great test comes. Too many of us forget that the Aristotelian tradition of common sense continues to live in our epoch and is, indeed, not the least of the directing forces in our modern modes of thought.

CHAS. F. RONAYNE

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